LITTLE NEA'S ENGAGEMENT

BY MRS. SOUTHWORTH

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933 W. 4 St.
Erie, Pa

Little Nea's Engagement

A Sequel to Nearest and Dearest

By MRS. E. D. E. N. SOUTHWORTH

Author of

"The Bride's Ordeal," "Gloria," "Why Did He Wed Her," "Em," "David Lindsay," Etc.

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Little Nea's Engagement

CHAPTER I

RUTH DUNN MYSTIFIED

It was a fine morning late in October that Ruth Dunn sat sewing in her humble room.

She was sad from many causes, but mostly that she saw so little of her son.

One day late in September, Roderick had come home in great agitation, and, to the anxious questions of his mother, he had answered that Mr. John Daw was very ill, not expected to live, and that Richard Daly had been sent down to St. Mary's to fetch Mrs. John Daw to his bedside.

"Then there will be a death-bed reconciliation between the husband and wife," Ruth had said.

"Yes, that is it," Roderick had replied, shaking with agitation.

He did not stay long. His duties at The Hill were heavier than ever, he explained, and he hurried back.

Three days after this he came again, and announced the death of Mr. John Daw. He was less moved now than on his last visit; but Ruth was more so; she wept with pity for the sorely bereaved father.

"Oh, I take it home to myself," she had said, between

her sobs. "I think—if I were to lose *you,* Roderick, what a desert this world would be to me! Oh, my boy, do all you can to serve and cheer and comfort him!"

"I will, dear mother; I will. And—if I cannot come to see you even so often as I have lately done, you will not feel lonely or anxious, I hope? You will think of me in attendance upon the sorrowful old man."

"Never mind me, dear Roderick. Do your duty to him. You are living and thriving. That is enough to content me—for the present."

"You were always self-sacrificing, dearest mother. I will write to you often if I cannot come to you," said the young man as he arose to take leave.

Later on Ruth heard the astounding news that had electrified the whole city—of how the body of John Daw had been stolen from the vault on the night of the funeral, and had been resuscitated by the doctors, who had kept their patient and nursed him secretly while he lay for many days between life and death, waiting until the question should be favorably settled before making known his revival from the grave to his friends.

Ruth had longed to see her son and hear from him full particulars of the truth; for all sorts of contradictory reports were flying through the air; but she had not seen him for weeks; the young man seemed to be too closely kept at work to give him the chance of coming to see his mother. But he had written, and she got letters from him two or three times, always saying that he was well, but very closely engaged.

At length, one morning, after an absence of three weeks, he surprised her with a visit. So long had she *starved* for her boy's presence that on seeing him enter her room she sprang up, threw her arms around his

neck and kissed him rapturously; then taking a deliberate look at him she turned pale to see how ill he was.

"Roderick! You are killing yourself!" she exclaimed, pushing him gently into her own easy-chair —"killing yourself for Lord John, and I won't allow it!"

"Dear mother, I am not the least ill, only pale and thin from too close work, and we are going to change all that now," said the young man with a faint smile.

"Ay, yes; what is it, Roderick? My lord does not think of parting with you?"

"No, indeed. His lordship is quite too fond of me for that. Why, he cannot bear me out of his sight."

"It is the instinct of paternal love. He *feels* that you are his son, although he does not know it," said the lady thoughtfully.

"I do really believe he does," said Roderick, with a strange smile.

"But what, then, is the nature of this impending change, if it is not the loss of your place?" inquired the lady.

"Something that you will like still less than my loss of place, dear mother, I fear," replied the young man.

"What is it, then? Tell me at once and put me out of suspense," said Ruth Dunn uneasily.

"Lord John Daw is going to take his invalid son to Europe for the young gentleman's health, and he is so very anxious for me to go with him that I do not think he will go without me."

"To Europe—so far away," faltered the mother. "Tell me frankly, Roderick."

"Yes, mother dear, it would be of the very greatest advantage to me, both mentally and materially, for it

is not only a sea voyage for health, but a tour of the Eastern Continent at the end of it, for knowledge."

"Then go, my dear, go! It would be a poor sort of love on my part that would keep you from such prosperity."

He came and put his arm around her, whispering:

"Dear mother, I am not worthy of you. I never was. I will not go on this voyage—if——"

"Roderick, dear, I *wish* you to go. When do you sail?"

"My lord has resolved too suddenly upon this journey. He wishes to leave Washington for Norfolk on Saturday."

"So soon!" exclaimed Ruth in consternation; then quickly correcting herself, she added cheerfully: "But after all, under the circumstances, this sudden parting is the best. How long do you expect to be gone?"

"Six months, or eight at the very most."

Ruth Dunn made a rapid calculation, and then said quite gayly:

"Ah, well, there will be little more than the winter between us. You will be home with the earliest flowers of spring; or, at latest, you will come with the roses of summer. You will see me as often as you can before you go?"

"I will see you every night before I go. In fact, I can spend every night here until the day of departure; but I shall have to come late and leave early."

Ruth Dunn's face beamed with joy.

"You will! You will! Oh, that will make the parting at last so much less hard!" she said. "And you came to stay to-night?" she demanded eagerly.

"Yes, mother dear; to-night, and every night until I go."

"Then I will get tea at once, and we will have a happy evening together," said Ruth blithely, as she arose to replenish the little wood fire that was burning on the hearth and to fill and put on her teakettle.

This was the first of a short season of happy nights the mother and son passed under the same home roof; for Roderick kept his word, and appeared punctually at eight o'clock each evening and remained until six each morning, taking supper and breakfast with her.

Friday evening was the last he spent with her, for early on Saturday morning, after breakfasting together at six o'clock, they parted, with mutual prayers and blessings, and with what fortitude they could command.

It was always Ruth Dunn's plan, when she herself was in trouble, to seek out those who were in greater trouble, and by ministering to the sorrows of others become reconciled to her own.

Roderick had left her a considerable sum of money. This enabled her to take a little leisure and do a little good among her poorer neighbors, who, in this particular autumn, were nearly all suffering more or less from malaria.

It was while engaged in this charity that a piece of good fortune came to Ruth Dunn and placed her in a position so congenial to her kind and motherly nature as to make her labor a pleasure and her duty a happiness.

At the sick beds of her proteges she often met her own pastor, the Rev. Mr. Moss, who, by this means, became better acquainted with his humble parishioner than he had ever been before.

Some weeks later, when frost had killed malaria, and Ruth's poor patients no longer needed her attentions, and she had resumed her plain needlework, the lonely

woman was seated before her little wood fire, with a basket of socks beside her, when she was surprised by a visit from the rector.

He begged that she would not let him hinder her work, and then sat down and told her that he had come to offer her the position of Matron in the Female Orphan Asylum.

The news was so surprising and delightful to Ruth that she could scarcely understand or believe it. But she accepted the situation.

The salary, the rector went on to say, was only one hundred and fifty dollars a year, yet she would have board, lodging, washing and medical attendance included. He finally said:

"Well, my dear Mrs. Dunn, the lady managers will hold a meeting to-morrow morning at the asylum. You know where it is—on H street?"

"Oh, yes, thank you, sir."

"Then if you will be there at ten o'clock I shall be on hand to present you to the managers. I have already recommended your appointment, and of course I was authorized by them to make you this offer," concluded the minister as he shook hands with Ruth and left the room.

The next morning Ruth Dunn went down to Washington and met the lady managers of the Female Orphan Asylum in their board-room.

She was introduced by the Rev. Mr. Moss, and made so favorable an impression upon the board that she was promptly engaged.

The establishment was a newly organized charity, and consisted first of a matron, a servant of all work, and eighteen little children, whose ages varied from two to twelve years.

As yet, no teacher had been found for them, though the managers were diligently searching for a competent one.

Ruth Dunn found her position quite as congenial as she had anticipated. She soon regulated her large juvenile household, and in addition to her strictly domestic duties she found time to give the children two hours of instruction in the schoolroom every morning. This was a voluntary work, until a regular teacher could be engaged.

Ruth soon won the love and confidence of all the children, and she would have been perfectly happy could she only have heard from her son often and regularly; but in those days all mails, and especially ocean mails, were very irregular; and when her Roderick had been gone three months, and the winter was half over, she had received but one letter from him, and that had been mailed on the day of his landing at Liverpool. It had brought the news of the health and well-being of his whole party and given the General Post Office, London, as the address to which all her letters to him must be sent.

Since that time she had heard no more from Roderick. She attributed all the lack of letters to the uncertainty of the mails, and she waited hopefully for news, and looked forward with joyful anticipation to his return in the summer.

Ah! had Ruth Dunn or her son foreseen the length of time that must elapse before they should meet again they might have hesitated before parting, and then —parted with heavier hearts. But they, no more than others, could foresee the future.

Meanwhile, Ruth Dunn went on hopefully with her labor of love.

The Board of Managers found great difficulty in securing a suitable teacher.

They wanted a Christian lady for the position; but all their applicants were half-educated women.

At last, near the end of March, she received a note from the lady president of the Board of Managers saying that a teacher had been secured, and requesting her to have rooms prepared for the young lady's reception by the first of April.

Ruth Dunn gladly went to work to prepare the schoolroom and bedchamber for the new occupant.

And punctually on the first of April she was summoned to the parlor to receive the teacher, who was brought to the house by one of the lady managers.

Ruth hurried down and opened the door of the parlor, where she saw—first the lady manager, in her black velvet hat and feathers and cashmere shawl, and then a slender little figure in widow's deepest weeds.

Ruth bowed to both.

"Mrs. Dunn," said the lady manager, "I bring you our new teacher. We have drawn a prize in the lottery of life. Let me introduce Mrs. Daw."

The little figure arose and threw aside her veil, and disclosed to Ruth Dunn's astonished eyes the beautiful, pale face of Eldiva.

Life had gone ill at Shadow Hall.

Poor, careless, kind-hearted Zora Roslyn had fallen deeper and deeper into debt.

Zora had sold her one complete silver set to provide the wedding outfit and supper of her niece, Eldiva.

And since that time she had been living on her less valuable personal effects. She had gradually sold off all her odds and ends of silver and of jewelry to pay

installments on her most pressing debts, for she could never pay one in full.

This winter, however, she had no expensive visitors, only her saturnine cousin, Neil Carnes, came up from the country, and without "leave or license" settled himself down in the house and put his sign out on the front door—with the view of practicing law in that locality.

NEIL CARNES, *Attorney-at-Law,*

however, attracted very few clients—the first one being his cousin and hostess, Zora Roslyn, to whom the presence of a lawyer in the house suggested the making of a will—though what poor Zora had to bequeath, beyond the guardianship of her child and a few barren acres of land in Maryland, was a mystery.

"Why do you wish to make a will at all? A healthy young woman like you, in your fresh prime?" demanded Carnes when she broached the subject to him.

"Oh, I don't know. It may be from a presentiment. I think of death," sighed Zora, seating herself on the second chair near the lawyer's office desk, for the conversation took place in the little front room over the hall, which Carnes had appropriated to his own business.

"You should not think of death at your age, Zora, but of something quite different. You should think of marriage. You want some one to take care of you and cheer you up. Come, Zora, let the will wait for a little while and listen to me," said Carnes, hitching his chair closer to hers.

She opened her blue eyes wide with dismay at the thick-set, bull-necked, bullet-headed, bilious-looking man, with his yellow skin, black hair and bushy brows, and shuddered.

He saw her shudder and shrink, but he continued:

"Come, Zora, you know how long and faithfully I have loved you, living a bachelor up to my fortieth year for your sake. Come, now, my dear, will you take me at last?" he said, attempting to put his arms around her waist.

"Cousin Neil," she exclaimed, drawing away, "you have had my answer long, long ago."

"Yes, my dear, I know. I have had your refusal twice already. When you were a young lady and I a young man, I offered you my hand, and you declined it and married Mr. Lovel. I wore the willow for your sake until Mr. Lovel departed this life, when, after a suitable interval, I again offered my hand, to have it declined in favor of Mr. Roslyn. Again I wore the willow until my second successful rival passed away, and now at this late day I beg you to reconsider my proposal."

"Cousin Neil, please say no more on this subject now. I appreciate all that you have said, and I am really grateful; but I must go away now," said Zora pleadingly.

"Go, then, my dear. I would not distress you for the world,' said Neil Carnes, rising and opening the door for the lady's exit.

He had not gained her formal acceptance of his plausible offer of marriage, yet when she had left the little office he lay back in his chair, shook his heavy form with silent laughter, and then quoted Shakespeare. You will scarcely need to be told the lines that he quoted, beginning with—

"Was ever woman in this humor wooed?
Was ever woman in this humor won?"

Then he opened a secret drawer in his desk and drew forth a folded newspaper, worn at the edges and yellow with age. He opened and spread it out on the desk and read a paragraph in the advertising columns as follows:

"NEXT OF KIN.—If the heirs of Fairmount Lovel, Esq., late of Brightwater Park, County of Sussex, England, will communicate with Messrs. Field & Field, Attorneys-at-Law, Inner Temple, London, East, they will hear something to their advantage."

Again Neil Carnes shook with silent laughter as he muttered to himself:

"Your first husband, my lady, was next of kin to the deceased squire, and heir to his large estate, and now your little daughter, Nea, is the heiress, while you yourself can claim your 'thirds.' "

Here, then, was the key to Neil Carnes' chivalric devotion to the poor widow and her orphan child.

Meanwhile, Zora Roslyn, utterly ignorant of the wealth that was waiting for her in England, and entirely unsuspicious of the mercenary motives of her suitor, hurried to her room, threw herself down in her armchair, and indulged in a fit of hysterical sobs and tears.

She could not have told why she cried. There was nothing particular to cry for, except, perhaps, that her nerves were excited and her impulses contradictory.

She was touched by her cousin Neil's constancy and magnanimity, as she called them; but she did not love him very much. She longed to be relieved of her cares and burdens and to be sheltered and protected; but she decidedly did not want to marry any one, least of all her cousin Neil, whom she had refused in her girlhood

and in her first widowhood. Now he had proposed again when, as she said, she was no longer young or fair, or rich, so that the sincerity as well as the constancy of his affections were proved beyond a doubt.

It would be a pity to cast off so faithful and disinterested a lover, even though she might not be able to return his love in full measure.

Ah! what is the use of going on with this explanation of poor Zora Roslyn's motives and impulses, even if she had any worth analyzing?

Before the week was out she had suffered herself to be persuaded into an engagement to become the wife of the saturnine lawyer.

Zora wrote and told the news to her nearest relations in St. Mary's—to old Mr. and Mrs. Wells, and others.

It did not surprise them in the least. They had long known of Neil Carnes' attachment, or former attachment to his cousin Zora. They had suspected that his removal to the city was upon her account. They told each other, "I said so."

Nor did any of them disapprove of the measure. They believed in marriages between relatives—between people who had known each other all their lives, instead of between mere acquaintances.

Altogether the marriage was an excellent one, they said, and their minds would be quite relieved on Zora's account.

So they wrote congratulatory letters to Mrs. Roslyn, which somewhat reassured her.

And they came up to the wedding, accompanied by Eldiva, who secretly doubted the good of the marriage, but deferred to the opinion of her elders.

There were some dissentient voices, however; the old servants, when they heard the news, shook their heads

and sighed and groaned over it. And little Nea, who was the very last to be told by her mother, received the news with such childish anguish and despair, and wept so grievously, with the tears raining from her darkened eyes, that her mother was tempted to break off her marriage then and there; and would certainly have done so had it not been for the presence of her relatives, who told her that children were always jealous of stepfathers; that this child would soon become reconciled; and in any case, it would, at this stage, be a folly and a scandal to break off the marriage.

The wedding took place on a windy morning in the first week of March, in the front drawing-room of Shadow Hall. It was a very quiet one, with nobody present except the officiating clergyman, the bride and groom, and their nearest relatives.

Immediately after the ceremony the newly wedded pair set out for the North on a short bridal tour, leaving Shadow Hall and little Nea in the care of Mr. and Mrs. Wells and Eldiva.

Eldiva devoted herself to the poor little blind child, who felt herself forsaken by all.

One day the young lady took the little girl for a drive, calling first at a florist's for some spring flowers growing in pots, and then going on toward the Congressional Burying Ground, as the East Washington Cemetery was then called.

On their way out Eldiva experimented on Nea's sight.

"Try to look at these, Nea," she said, placing a gorgeous red and yellow tulip and an azure hyacinth side by side before her. "Can you see any difference between these?"

"Yes," replied the child slowly. "One looks like fire

and flame through a blur—oh! like a little of the sunshine or the sunset——"

"That is the tulip," said Eldiva.

"And the other is like—is like—what I used to see in the deep blue sky right overhead in the summer, before I went blind—but it is all through a blur."

"That is the hyacinth."

"Yes, I knew it was the hyacinth by the smell. Oh! isn't it a delicious smell?"

When they reached the gate of the "Burying Ground" Eldiva alighted and lifted Nea from the carriage and entered the cemetery, followed by Gad with his arms full of flower-pots.

She walked down the main avenue between rows of Congressional monuments that some one has since compared to inverted cheese boxes, and finally reached the rising ground near the southeast corner, in which was the grave of old Hugh Condit.

There Eldiva placed the flowers, and then she sent Gad to borrow a watering-pot from the keeper and fill it from the well, to water the growing plants on the grave.

"Who is buried here, Diva?" inquired the child.

"No one is buried here, love. Only some one's body."

"Then why plant flowers here, Diva?"

"Because while we live in the flesh we cling to the flesh, I suppose, my dear; I know no other reason."

The return of Gad with the watering-pot stopped the conversation.

And when their work was done they went back to the carriage and drove home.

At the end of two weeks Mr. and Mrs. Carnes returned from their short tour, and two days later Mr. and Mrs. Wells left Shadow Hall for Bloomfield.

Eldiva remained in her old home; but she soon began to feel very ill at ease within it. Zora was, as always, most affectionate to her niece, Mr. Carnes was faultlessly polite in all outward observances, but in some subtle way he made the young lady feel that she was unwelcome.

Eldiva had many relatives and visiting places, but no home to call her own; not even *this,* now that Neil Carnes was the master of the house.

In her morbid pride she would not draw one dollar of the money that Lord John Daw had placed to her account in the United States Bank.

And without that she had no means of living. She was seriously thinking what manner of work she could do to support herself, when one morning, in opening the *National Intelligencer,* she saw in it an advertisement for a teacher at the new Female Orphan Asylum.

She made up her mind on the instant, and without saying a word on the subject to Zora, she dressed herself and walked up into the city to the house of the lady president of the Board of Managers, and made her application for the place in person.

Her references were numerous and satisfactory, and her engagement was secured before she left the house.

On her return home she had to tell Zora, who burst into tears and cried out strongly and bitterly against the arrangement; but there were occasions on which Eldiva could be as firm as a rock, and this was one of them.

So on the first of the ensuing April she took leave of the family and went to enter upon her duties at the asylum.

"A very fitting day to go upon such a fool's errand," Zora had remarked on her departure.

And Eldiva's arrival at the asylum astonished Mrs. Dunn, as has been told.

CHAPTER II

NEIL CARNES' SCHEME

Neil Carnes caused the advertisement for the Lovel heirs that appeared in the English papers to be inserted in the Washington *National Intelligencer,* and then took it and showed it to his wife, with an air of surprise, as if he had just seen it then for the first time.

"*You* are the next of kin to Lovel, of Brightwater Park, are you not?" he inquired, in assumed ignorance, as the lady devoured the paragraph with her eyes.

"Why, no; of course not. I am not a Lovel. Nerissa's father, had he lived, would have been the next of kin, and the heir. I suppose, as his widow, I should have been entitled to my 'thirds'; but in any case, Nerissa is the heiress; and failing her, you would be the inheritor," said Zora, with her eyes still riveted to the advertisement.

"I!" exclaimed the man in well-feigned surprise.

"Of course! You ought to know that as well as I do, Neil. You are almost as near a kin to my first husband as you are to me. Your grandmother was a Lovel!"

"Ah, true! I did not think of that. What genealogists you women are, to be sure. But, after all, it is of no consequence, my distant relationship to Lovel of Brightwater. Here are you and dear little Nea, who are the fortunate inheritors, and I congratulate you both with all my heart."

"Thank you, Neil. And you know, dear, it is all the same; for whatever is mine is yours."

"You were ever generous, Zora, love. Now, I suppose I ought to put myself in communication with the Messrs. Field & Field, and then begin to collect documents and proofs."

"Oh, pray do so at once, Neil, dear; no time should be lost. Ah! we have been so poor, so pushed for money! And, oh, *genteel* poverty is the hardest of all poverty to bear. It must be so."

"I should think it is, indeed. Yes, Zora, I will go to work to-day—but what is the matter with you, Zora? Has this good news quite overcome you so as to set you shaking as with ague?" suddenly inquired Carnes, bending his beetle brows upon his shivering wife.

"No, Neil, no; but I think I have a chill. I had it before you brought me the paper. But it is nothing; it will go off, and I will take some bark. Never mind me. See to the inheritance."

"Where is the old Bible with the family record in it, to begin upon?"

"Oh, on the stand in the nursery, where it always stays," said the lady.

The man left the room, taking the papers with him, and Zora ran out into the garden, where Nea was at play, and caught the blind child up in her arms, exclaiming:

"Oh, my darling, darling little daughter, fortune has come to you at last!—fortune, my Nerissa! You are an heiress; you will have plenty of money, and can go to Paris to consult the best oculists there, and——"

"Mamma, dear, what is it all about? What are you talking about?" inquired Nea in fear and trembling, as

the half-hysterical mother sank down upon a seat in the summer-house.

"You are an heiress, Nea! You are the sole heiress of a great fortune!"

"Tell me more, mamma, dear—tell me more! I don't know what you mean yet," said the little girl in sore perplexity.

The lady entered into an explanation and made the matter as clear as practicable to the mind of the child.

"And shall I—*I*—have all that money for my very own?"

"Yes, my darling, yes."

"To do *just* what I please with it?" demanded the child as her darkened eyes dilated with wonder.

"Yes, love, yes, as soon as you become of age; and in the meantime you shall have as much to use as you wish. You shall not be stinted even now."

"And when I grow up it will be all mine to do what I please with?"

"Yes, love, yes."

"Then I will divide it all between you and Lance," exclaimed Nea, clapping her hands for joy, and then leaning her cheek caressingly against her mother's face.

"Darling Nea!" softly breathed the lady, folding the child closer to her bosom.

"What makes your hands so cold, mamma?" inquired the little girl. "They are like ice."

"I think I have a chill, love. We will go in the house," replied Zora, putting Nea down on her feet and rising to leave the summer-house.

She took the child by the hand and led her into the sitting-room and sat down by the fire that the early spring morning made very acceptable.

She took Nea on her lap and stretched out her own

feet to the glowing brands; but the cold shiverings increased so much, and were attended with such distressing languor and general illness, that at length she rang a hand-bell that stood upon the mantel-piece and brought old Aunt Apple to her presence.

"I have got an ague, auntie, and I want you to make some hot balm tea and bring a hot brick for my feet. I am going up to bed now," said Mrs. Carnes, as once more she put Nea off her lap and rose from her seat.

"Lors-a-messy upon me, Miss Zora! Yer looks like deff, honey! Yer face is as blue as a blue-bag! Lemmy help yer upstars and den I kin tend ter de tea and de hot brick," said the old woman, anxiously proffering her services.

And in fact Zora Carnes had become so very ill that she was glad to avail herself of old Apple's assistance.

She went upstairs leaning on the old woman's arm, and closely followed by Nea, who, young as she was, had had some experience in ague and fever, and thought that nothing more serious ailed her mother.

Zora was carefully undressed and put to bed, where she lay shuddering under a pile of blankets, and attended by her blind child, while Apple went down to the kitchen to heat the brick and brew the balm tea.

But this attack of illness was no mere ague fit. The cold spell was succeeded by a fever that soon rose to a great height, and before night Zora Carnes was raving in delirium.

Dr. Hamilton, summoned in haste, pronounced the case a very serious one.

And before the week was ended typhus fever had declared itself.

Eldiva was summoned from her post at the orphan asylum to the bedside of her suffering relative.

And having obtained leave of absence from the board of managers, she promptly responded to the call and devoted herself to the patient.

Neil Carnes also showed himself as one of the most affectionate and faithful of husbands, seldom leaving the sickroom, and never leaving the house after the dangerous symptoms had set in.

Dr. Hamilton came three times a day and called a consultation of the most eminent physicians of the city.

On the fourteenth day of her illness Zora returned to consciousness long enough to kiss and bless her child, and then she fell into a state of coma, from which she quietly passed away.

The widowed husband exhibited a wildness of sorrow that caused his friends to fear for his reason.

Little Nea sank into a silent and motionless stupor of despair that really seemed like insensibility or idiocy.

Eldiva showed the greatest firmness of all the household. The last few years had inured her to suffering. She kept her self-control, and took the direction of affairs in the suddenly disorganized household.

The mortal remains of poor Zora Carnes were laid in the family lot in the Congressional Burying Ground.

When Eldiva's leave of absence had expired she prepared to leave Shadow Hall, and begged Neil Carnes, who was now the guardian of Nerissa Lovel, to allow the child to go with her to the asylum.

"Not as an inmate, to be entered on the books, of course, Cousin Neil, but as my visitor and charge," she explained.

But Carnes answered her that Nea was all that was left to him of his beloved Zora, and he could not part with her.

Eldiva, who did not esteem the man very highly, now

wondered at the depth of his love for Zora, and grief at her loss, which was so strong as to make him hold on to the blind child, who could only be a troublesome burden to him. He did not tell her, or any one else, that Nea was now the heiress of millions, and that he had a deep pecuniary interest in keeping her under his own control; nor did Eldiva suspect the change of fortune that had come to the girl, for she had never seen the advertisement in the *National Intelligencer,* which had appeared but once and then had been withdrawn; or if she had, she never would have suspected that it referred to Nerissa.

So Eldiva left Shadow Hall, reluctantly abandoning the blind girl to the doubtful care of her stepfather and the tender service of the faithful but ignorant old negroes.

Now, Neil Carnes would have been the heir of Brightwater Park but for the blind girl who stood between him and its vast revenues. He was in most respects a thoroughly selfish and unprincipled villain; but, as a matter of temperament, he was no murderer at heart. He would have shrunk from taking life, even if he had been certain that he could do so without detection and with perfect impunity; but he was very anxious to get Nerissa out of his way before taking any steps toward a correspondence with the solicitors who had advertised in the London *Times* for the heirs of the Brightwater estate.

He searched the family records and studied their genealogy; and almost at the outset of his investigations he discovered a fact that, perverted and misrepresented, might secure to him the immediate inheritance.

It was *this*:

George Lovel, the husband of Zora, and father of

Nerissa, had, in one sense, died childless, and in total ignorance that a posthumous child would be born to him; so he had left a will bequeathing all his small personal effects to his widow.

Nerissa came into this world just six months after her father's departure from it.

After her mother's second marriage, to Duncan Roslyn, when the child was about three years old, Nea, in the careless manner of the country, was called by her stepfather's name, and no one but the immediate friends and neighbors of the parties knew that she had any right to any other name.

Of course, Nerissa, as she grew up, knew that she was a Lovel, though she was accustomed to hear herself called Roslyn, and loved the latter name because it was Lance's and her mother's, better than she did the former one, which was that of her father, whom she had never seen.

Neil Carnes was now posted in all these particulars, and was resolved to twist and turn them all to his own advantage, as he well knew how to do.

That George Lovel had died without heirs could be easily proved; that a posthumous child had been born to him could be as easily suppressed, under all the circumstances; that on this side of the ocean no one interested in the little heiress knew anything about the inheritance, while on the other side no one interested in the inheritance knew anything about the rightful heiress.

Nerissa Lovel ignored and put out of the way, the claim of Neil Carnes to the estate through his maternal grandmother was as clear as possible.

Thus, if Neil Carnes could effectually conceal the existence of Nerissa, and take the proofs of his own claim

to England, there seemed nothing to prevent his immediate entrance into the Brightwater estate. To be rid of Nerissa was the first necessity in the case.

But to be rid of her without doing her any bodily harm.

While he was turning this matter over in his mind he received a note, through the post-office, from Eldiva, in which she requested him to send her certain books, bearing her name, which she had left at Shadow Hall.

In a fit of good-nature, Neil Carnes looked up the books specified—Walter Scott's "Poems," James Fennimore Cooper's "Spy," and some other then new publications, and took them in person to the asylum.

On inquiry at the door he was told that Mrs. Daw was in the schoolroom.

He sent in his card, and very soon Eldiva, leaving her pupils in the care of a "big girl," as "monitor," came out to receive her visitor.

She warmly thanked Mr. Carnes for the trouble he had taken in bringing her books, and then asked him if he would like to look through the institution.

He assented, and she conducted him through the asylum.

Then they returned together to the parlor, where they found a tall and handsome brunette of middle age, whom Eldiva introduced as Mrs. Dunn, the matron of the asylum.

With her was a visitor, to whom she had been called. He was a short, stout, red-haired man, with a large, inflamed face, and a breath redolent of rum. He was, however, neatly dressed in gray homespun cloth, and looked like a decent countryman marred by intemperance. He wanted to get a girl, "a bound girl," as he said, to live in his family, but was informed that the

asylum did not "bind out" its orphan inmates to domestic service.

"Umph!" exclaimed the countryman. "Then I suppose I must go and inquire at the poorhouse."

And he arose from the chair into which he had unceremoniously thrown himself, picked up his hat from the floor, and turned to leave the room.

"Stop one moment," said Neil Carnes, laying his hand gently upon the stranger's arm.

"Eh?" exclaimed the latter, turning around.

"I think I know a girl, one of a large family, whose poor, overburdened father would be glad to send her into a good home."

"Eh, what? Where is she? If she suits me I might take her," said the man.

"Can you call at my house this afternoon or evening? Here is my card, with the address. Shadow Hall, New Jersey avenue."

"Well, yes, I reckon I mought as well go there as go to the poorhouse for a gal; it's a deal nigher, for I know the poorhouse is way out nigh the outskirts of the city some'rs," replied the countryman, taking and pocketing the card.

Then he gruffly lifted his hat and departed.

"I hope you will excuse me, sir, but I must return to my duties," said Ruth as she inclined her head to Carnes and walked out, leaving the cousins together.

"What have you to say to me, Neil?" inquired Eldiva.

"I wish to tell you that I think of taking Nerissa to Paris this spring."

"To PARIS!" exclaimed Eldiva, in a tone of astonishment that no capital letters could convey.

"Yes, my dear girl, to Paris. You know it was the dream of her poor, dear mother's life to take the girl

to Paris and have her eyes treated by the famous oculists there."

"Yes; but it was *only* a dream."

"A dream that I shall try to realize by taking the girl to Paris and having her eyes examined by the most eminent oculists of that great city," said Neil Carnes.

"Indeed, at this stage, I do really think that you had better let Nea's eyes alone and leave her to nature. Why, don't you know that she is gradually recovering her sight? Don't you know that she can see to go all about the house, and up and down the stairs, without being obliged to feel her way, and without the slightest danger of falling?" demanded Eldiva.

"Yes, I know that, but——"

"And she can even tell us apart by sight when she stands very close?"

"I am aware of that, but——"

"And her sight is surely, though slowly, improving. Better let well enough alone—especially where the eyesight of a child is concerned, Cousin Neil."

"Now, Eldiva, you are talking like a child! Who do you suppose is the better judge of these matters—you or the world-renowned oculists to whom I am going to submit the case?" questioned Neil Carnes.

"When do you intend to sail for Europe?" coldly inquired Eldiva, without answering his question.

"In a very few days; but I shall bring Nerissa here to take leave of you before we leave."

"And how long do you think you will be absent?"

"Oh, that depends upon the length of time it may take to treat the child's eyes; but if the oculist should decide that it will be better to let them alone we can return at once."

"And what do you intend to do with Shadow Hall in the meanwhile? Shut it up?"

"No; give it up, sell the furniture to a dealer, and send the negroes down to Bloomfield."

"And your own business?" pursued Eldiva.

"Will go to the—*dogs,* of course; but I would sacrifice much more than my business for the good of dear Nerissa, all that I have left of my most beloved wife. But, however, when I return I shall be able to recover my business. And now, my dear little cousin, as I have kept you already too long from your schoolroom, I must bid you good-day," said Carnes, rising and shaking hands with Eldiva.

"He is a very strange man," said the young lady when he had left.

Meanwhile, Neil Carnes hurried home. He thought he had discovered a plan of ridding himself of Nerissa without danger or suspicion.

The little girl happened to be the first to meet him on his return.

"Cousin Neil," said the child, who had continued to call her stepfather by the name she had been accustomed to give him before his marriage with her mother—"Cousin Neil, there has been a man here to see you."

"What sort of a man, my little lady?" inquired the lawyer, laying his hand upon her dark, curling hair.

"A big, bluff man."

"How did your ladyship know he was a big, bluff man? Could you see him?" laughed the lawyer.

"Oh, yes, I could see *that* much! And he said he would come aagin in the evening."

"Ah!" said the lawyer; and he said no more just then.

In the evening, after Nerissa had gone to bed, the

visitor came again, and was received alone by Neil Carnes in the lawyer's office.

He was the countryman whom Neil had met at the asylum in search of a little white slave.

As soon as he was closeted with the lawyer in his sanctum he opened his business by abruptly asking when he could see the girl that he wanted to have bound to him if she would suit.

Carnes replied that he might see her the next day, but that he wished first to ask his visitor some questions.

"Fire away!" said the man.

"In the first place, what is your name? You have not told me that yet," said Carnes.

"Tom Roach, and not ashamed to own it! What next?"

"Your business?"

"Butcher."

"Ah! Where do you live?"

"'Bout a hundred miles back in the country—Rappahannock County, Ole Virginny."

"Umph! Married?"

"In course I am, else wot would I want with a female servant?"

"Ah! to be sure! Children, of course?"

"Three little uns under five year old. Too little to work. That's w'y the old 'oman wants a bound gal to help 'er. Wot else?"

"Well—I do not know if I have any other question to ask you—except this: Is there any one here in the city you could refer to for your own"—the lawyer was about to say *character,* but fearing to offend, he said, after a pause—"responsibility?"

"Don't know a blamed man, woman or child in this blamed city, and don't want to!"

"Ah!" exclaimed the lawyer in a tone that was unconsciously a blithe one. "Well, what brought you to Washington, if I might ask the question?"

"A little matter of private business as is no one's affair but my own. And while I was here I promised the ole 'oman to look around and find her a bound gal out'n the poorhouse or 'sylum. That's all about it. Now, then?"

"Now, then, I have business in London County next week, and I will bring you down a handy girl of thirteen, for whom I really wish to get a country home, and whom I will guarantee as honest, truthful, humble and industrious."

"The very gal for us, if you can prove her to have them good points."

"I can, then; but can you wait a week for her?"

"For such a gal as that? Well, now, I reckon I might manage to do so."

"Very well. Give me your address."

"My which?"

"Tell me the name of the town where you live."

"Oh, it ain't a town, exactly; it is a village. The village of Greenmont, on the Winchester road."

"Very well. When do you return to your home?" inquired Neil Carnes as he proceeded to take down the name and address of his visitor in his notebook.

"I'm gwine back to-morrow morning, please the pipers."

"And you will be at home all the week?"

"Where else would I be? In course I shall be at home."

"Then you may expect me with the girl next week."

"Very well, then, I *will* expect yer! And don't yer go and diserpint me, neither! And now I'll bid yer good-night. I'm puttin' up at the 'Drovers,' an' it is some distance from this yere. Good-night, squire. It's lucky I fell in long o' you. Good-night."

"Good-night," said Neil Carnes as he closed the door after his visitor.

Then he sat down and rubbed his hands, saying to himself:

"She had as well be in the midst of the Great Desert Sahara as down in Rappahannock, where no one in Washington will be likely ever to hear of her again, while no one in London ever *has* heard of her. And after a while, when my claim is settled, and it will be safe to do so, I will look after her and provide comfortably for her."

And with this balm laid to his somewhat disturbed conscience, the lawyer went to his chamber and retired to bed.

In the course of the following week all his arrangements were completed.

The furniture was sent off to auction, the old servants packed off with the old horse and cariole to St. Mary's County, and the house given up.

While these changes were being made Neil Carnes took board for himself and his little stepdaughter at a private house in the immediate neighborhood.

Again Eldiva begged that the little girl might be permitted to remain with her at the asylum until the day of their departure should come; but again Neil Carnes declared that he could not, even for a day, consent to part with the dear child, who was all that he had left of his beloved wife.

And Eldiva wondered at his devotion to the memory

of Zora, and half believed in it, for why else should he burden himself *always* with the care of a child whose imperfect sight must render her a source of constant anxiety?

The old servants raised a horrible "hullaballoo" at the parting with their little mistress, and could only be reconciled by the assurance that she was going to Paris to have her sight restored.

On the last day before leaving the city Neil Carnes took Nerissa to the asylum to bid good-by to Eldiva.

They held their farewell interview in the parlor.

Nerissa, child like, was pleased at the idea of going to sea. *Lance* was at sea, and she had a vague idea that she might meet him somewhere "over yonder."

Eldiva was grieved at the separation, but consoled by the seeming happiness of Nerissa.

It was growing late, the lawyer arose to take leave, and little Nerissa threw herself into the arms of Eldiva, exclaiming:

"Good-by! Good-by! Good-by! dear Diva! Put flowers on my darling mother's grave when you put them on your friends'. Not *cut* flowers, to die there, but planted flowers, to grow and bloom like she is blooming in Heaven."

"Yes, love; I will remember and do so."

"And when I come back, a few months from this time, may be I may be able to see your dear face plainly, *plainly,*" added the little girl.

"Yes, dear. Look at me now, dear Nea, and let me look at your pretty eyes," said the young lady, putting her hand under the child's chin and raising it. "Such beautiful brown orbs! Who would think their sight less than perfect? Can you see my face at all, Nea?"

The child fixed her star-like eyes upon her, intently gazing, and then said:

"With all my *might,* I can see your pale, soft face and dark hair and—dark eyes and—red lips—dimly."

"Can you see all that, Nea?"

"Oh, yes, when I look steadily, and send out my *mind* into my eyes."

"Then you *are* indeed recovering your sight, and I don't see the use of your going to Paris!" exclaimed Eldiva.

"Oh, but I *want* to go! I want to see well enough to learn to read and write against the time when Lance comes back."

"To be sure she does! Don't try to hinder the child, Eldiva! Come, Nea, we must really be going. Good-by, Eldiva!" said the lawyer abruptly, holding out his hand to the young lady.

"And is this really good-by? Shall I see you no more before leaving the city?" inquired Eldiva regretfully.

"Why, certainly not. We leave before daybreak to-morrow morning in the Alexandria stage coach, *en route* for Norfolk, to take passage on the *Swan,* which sails from that port on Saturday. Once more, good-by."

Eldiva shook hands with Neil Carnes and then caught and strained Nerissa to her heart before releasing her.

Neil Carnes took Nerissa back to the house where they had lodged since Shadow Hall had been dismantled, and where the good landlady and all her boarders had been greatly edified by the seeming devotion of the man to his little stepdaughter.

And the next morning, before daybreak, they both entered the stage coach that called for them at the house door, and started for Alexandria, the first stage of their journey to Norfolk.

They reached that old port shortly after sunrise and stopped at the old Royal George Tavern.

Neil Carnes purposely allowed the schooner for Norfolk to sail without them, and then took Nerissa down to the wharf that they might find out they were too late for the *Swallow*.

"There will not be another packet for a week, Nea, and it will be of no use to stay in this town, and unlucky to go back to Washington. Suppose we take the Winchester stage coach to-night and start for the Blue Ridge Mountains? You have never been there. How would you like that?"

"Oh, very much! Oh, *so* much! I have never seen a mountain in my life! I have only heard them read about!" eagerly exclaimed the child.

"And you *can* see them, if we go?"

"Oh, yes, for I can see hills and woods against the sky, dimly, you know."

"Then you shall see mountains."

"Oh, Cousin Neil, you are so very good to me! Mother, in heaven, must love you so much!" said Nea, gratefully.

"Nonsense! Nonsense, child!" exclaimed the lawyer with a twinge of his conscience.

There was not much to see in Alexandria, but Neil Carnes took his little stepdaughter around the town and devoted himself to her amusement all the forenoon.

After dinner the tired child lay down and slept until tea time.

The next morning, after breakfasting by candlelight, the lawyer and his little charge set out in the Winchester stage for Rappahannock County.

At sunrise the next morning they entered the little mountain hamlet of Greenmont.

Neil Carnes woke up his little stepdaughter just as the stage drew up at the rural tavern of the "Eagle."

He took her gently out of the coach and led her into the house, and gave her into the care of a bright negro chambermaid, and then set off on foot to look up the butcher.

He found him living over his own shop, in a small, two-story, white-framed house.

Roach was behind his own counter, upon which lay steaks, cutlets, sausages and so forth, while hams and shoulders hung from the ceiling.

"Good-morning! How is business?" inquired the lawyer, standing before the counter.

"Good-morning!—oh, business—dull as ditchwater! So you've come! Where's the gal?" inquired the man, whose breath, early as it was in the morning, smelt of rum.

"She is at the tavern. I wanted to have a little more talk with you before you see her. In the first place, she is a strong, healthy girl——"

"If she isn't yer needn't fetch her to us! One inwaleed is enough in one house, an' that's my ole 'oman," interrupted the man.

"Oh! Is your wife sick?"

"Never well! There's where it is! Allers a-gruntin'."

"Ah!—I was about to tell you that this girl, Nelly Ross, is an orphan, for whom I have undertaken to procure a good home in the country. She does not yet know that she is to be placed out at service, and I do not wish that she should know it until I have gone. She is much attached to me, and would make a scene at parting. So I propose to leave her, as if for a day's sport on the mountain, and you can explain as much

as you please after my departure. Do you understand?"

"Oh, yes. It is something like the dodge the tender-hearted masters use w'en they take the little niggers away to sell 'em among strangers," said Tom Roach.

Neil Carnes winced.

"But look yer, now! I'm not a-gwine to 'buy a pig in a poke!' I must see that gal before I 'gree to take her; for if she ain't up to the mark I'll not have 'er even if you did fetch 'er," said the butcher.

"Very well; you shall see her."

"An' my ole 'oman must see 'er, too. My ole 'oman is mighty particular. She wouldn't have a little nigger about her at no price. She can't abide 'em. That's the reason w'y I had to look for a w'ite gal to wait on 'er."

"Very well, I say. Your wife can see her, and she will see that the girl is a treasure. Bring your wife up to the tavern after breakfast, and warn her to drop no word by which the girl may suspect that she is to be left behind."

"Oh, *she's* sharp, is my ole 'oman."

"And you are to take your *cue* from me."

"Jes' so."

"Good-morning, then. I shall expect you after breakfast," said Neil Carnes as he left the shop.

When he got back to the Eagle, breakfast was on the table, and Nerissa waiting for Cousin Neil to take her down.

They were very hungry, and keenly enjoyed the fresh venison steaks and other mountain luxuries that were not yet out of season.

After breakfast Neil told his little stepdaughter to put on her hat and walk up and down the piazza with him, and while they were walking he said:

"This will rest you after sitting cramped up so long in the stage-coach."

"Yes, Cousin Neil. Thank you. Oh, how good you are to me!" replied the girl.

"Presently I am going up on the mountain for a day's sport. That would be too tiresome a jaunt for you."

"Oh, yes, Cousin Neil! Never mind me!"

"And I do not like to leave you alone in this public tavern."

"Oh, I am not a bit afraid, Cousin Neil. You go and enjoy yourself. Never mind me," said the child, with eager generosity.

"Ah! but it is not right to leave you here alone. So I have asked a worthy couple whom I used to know before they moved away from the city and settled in this place, to call and take you to their home for the day. Will you go?"

"Oh, yes, Cousin Neil, if it will make you feel any easier."

"That's my good little girl! And sure enough, here come our friends," added the lawyer as the butcher and his wife walked up into the piazza.

"Ah! good-morning! This is the little girl I wish to leave in your care to-day, Mr. Roach. And this lady I think, is Mrs. Roach?" said Neil Carnes in a confused manner as he presented Nerissa to her future master and then turned to greet her future mistress, who was a small, thin, sallow-faced woman, with black hair and very sharp black eyes.

"Yes! this is my ole 'oman! *She'll do,*" whispered the butcher, after a searching glance at his future white slave.

"Come this way a moment," whispered Neil Carnes to the butcher, leading him off to the other end of the piazza and leaving the little girl to make acquaintance with her new mistress.

"Your wife is posted?" inquired Neil Carnes when they were out of hearing of the others.

"Oh, yes. She's just a-gwine to treat the little 'un as a wisitor, 'for this day only,' as the circus folks say."

"Quite right. And, Roach, it nearly breaks my heart to leave the child. But what can be done? I can't travel around the world with a girl tugging at my heels. What I was going to say is this: Don't let her know that I have given her up. Let her think that I have been lost or killed on the mountains or something."

"Jes' so; I understand, Judge."

After a little more talk, the two men turned and joined the woman and child.

A few minutes later they, the new master and mistress, prepared to depart with their little white slave.

Nerissa threw herself in her stepfather's arms, exclaiming:

"You are so good, so good to me, Cousin Neil! You think of me all the time. Take care of yourself on the mountain, dear Cousin Neil. Don't let the bears or wolves get at you."

"No, my darling, I will not. Hurry off now, and don't keep our good friends waiting," exclaimed Neil Carnes, whose conscience was becoming troublesome again.

Nea laughed, kissed him heartily and joined the couple, who led her away into bondage more bitter than that of negro slavery.

Ten minutes after that, Neil Carnes set off to walk

to the next post-house, where he took the stage for Winchester, *en route* for Norfolk, whence on Saturday he sailed by the *Swan* for London.

CHAPTER III

LITTLE NEA'S TROUBLES

LITTLE NEA, unconscious of having been betrayed into captivity, followed her new master and mistress quite cheerfully.

The sidewalk of the mountain hamlet street was very rugged, however, and Nea lagged behind and stumbled more than once.

"Why don't you walk, little girl?" inquired Roach, looking back.

The pavement is so rough, and—I'm afraid of falling," said Nea deprecatingly.

The man burst out into a loud laugh.

"Pavement!" he exclaimed. "Who ever heard of a pavement in Greenmont?" he inquired as he took the hand of the child to lead her on.

His sallow-cheeked, black-eyed little wife looked querulously around, but said nothing just then.

"How long has your mother and father been dead?" coarsely inquired the man, glancing down at Nea's black dress.

"My father has been in heaven twelve years——" began Nea; but here the woman interrupted her.

"Why, you're hardly twelve years old yourself. How could he be dead so long if he was your father?"

"I don't know, ma'am; but he went to heaven months before I came in the world."

"Oh! How long has your mother been dead?"

Here the child broke down; but she repressed her rising sobs and tears, and falteringly answered:

"My dear mother is *not* dead, ma'am; nor my father, either. They are even more alive than we are, for they live in heaven."

"Oh, I reckon you're a Sunday-school scholar, ain't you? What Sunday-school did you go to? The Methodist, was it?" inquired the woman.

'No, ma'am; I never went to any," replied the child.

"Never went to any Sunday-school? That was great neglect in your people. Why didn't they send you?"

"It was on account of my eyes."

"'Eyes!'" echoed the woman. "What's the matter with your eyes?"

"I had the measles and lost my sight when I was a baby," gently replied Nea.

"Oh, you did!" exclaimed the woman, stopping short and turning the child around to face her. "Look up here at me!"

Nea obeyed, lifting her beautiful, soft brown orbs to meet the sharp, black beads of her mistress.

"Well, there's nothing the matter with your eyes *now,* anyhow; they're as sound-looking eyes as I ever saw in my life. So that old excuse won't do any longer, and you'll have to go to Sunday-school—after your work's done—Sunday mornings," said the woman as she released the child and walked on.

"'Work's done Sunday mornings!'" echoed Nea in perplexity, while Thomas Roach nudged his wife and whispered:

"Don't you know she hasn't been told yet? It's to be broke to her."

"Oh, I forgot. And I don't see the use of such nonsense, anyway," snapped the sharp little woman as they reached their own door, and entered through the shop, where the overpowering smell of raw fresh meat sickened Nea.

"Took in any money this morning, Tom?" inquired the butcher of a fat, freckle-faced, flaxen-haired boy behind the counter.

"No, dad; not a cent."

"Dull, discouraging sort of a place to live in. I'll have to salt down the most of that meat if I don't sell it before night," growled the butcher as he took his place behind the counter.

The boy came out and followed his mother, who was leading the way into the back room.

"Are you the new bound girl?" inquired the lad, good-naturedly going to the side of Nea, when they had reached the dingy little parlor.

"Hold your tongue, you fool, can't you?" sharply demanded his mother as she turned and administered a sound box of the ears of the inquisitive boy.

Nea shuddered and repressed the question of: "What do you mean?" that was rising to her lips.

The woman dropped down in a low rocking-chair as if she was exhausted—in fact, there was nothing vigorous about the sallow little creature except her temper. She slowly took off her bonnet and her shawl, and handed them to the child, saying:

"Here, Nelly, take these upstairs and hang them up in the closet; and you can leave your own hat and cape up there, too."

"Yes, ma'am. Where are the stairs?" inquired the

little girl, gazing vaguely around and seeing nothing clearly.

"Where are the stairs? Where are your *eyes?* There are the stairs—there, in that corner!" querulously exclaimed Mrs. Roach, pointing to a stepladder that led up into a trap-door.

Nea, unconscious of her real position in the house, and wondering greatly at the impoliteness of her supposed hostess, gathered the things in her arms and groped to the foot of the ladder, and began to climb it carefully.

"You go out in the kitchen and make a fire to get dinner; and then bring the apples in. You and Nelly'll have to pare them. Where are the children?" demanded the mother.

"In the back yard," shortly replied the boy, still nursing his smarting ear.

"'In the back yard!' Playing in the dirt, I'll warrant. Go right straight and bring them in! *That's* the way you take care of them when I'm gone! Go bring 'em right straight in!"

"I was minding of the shop, and couldn't be following of them at the same time," grumbled the boy.

"You——"

But before another word of rebuke could be uttered she started up with a loud scream, exclaiming:

"What in the world has happened?"

Yes, what had happened?

A crash, a fall through the trap-door, and the form of the half-blind child lying motionless at the foot of the ladder.

Thomas Roach rushed in from the shop, the small children ran in from the yard.

"What the deuce has been the matter here?" demanded Roach with his hair on end.

"Don't you see the bound girl has fallen through the trap-door and killed herself?" screamed Mrs. Roach, frantic with excitement. "It's all *your* fault, Roach! Yours, your, yours! And I'm the most *tried* woman on the face of the earth! You had no business to bring her here. None, none, none! You might have known she would fall down and kill herself, and now she's gone and done it!"

"Oh, I *hope* not! Oh, my Lord, I hope not!" groaned Roach, who was down on his knees beside the body of the girl, trying to find out the extent of her injuries, while the boy stood by gaping and staring with astonishment and terror. "Maybe she's only stunned. I *think* she's only stunned. Tom, run—run for the doctor and ask him please to hurry here directly. Tell him what's happened. Be off like a shot!" said the man.

Tom went off like a shot.

"Oh, *how* did this happen, Jane?" demanded the man, turning toward his wife.

"How did it happen? Don't be a bigger fool than ever, Roach! It happened by her falling through the trap-door. It's all *your* fault—every bit! I'm the most *tried* woman that ever did live! Why don't you lift up the girl and lay her on the sofa?"

"My dear, I am afraid to move her until the doctor comes for fear I might do harm. If there should be any bones broken——"

"Bones broken! Her neck's broken, as you might have known it would be! It's all *your* doings! You've got that girl's life to answer for! Oh, what trouble! I'm the most tried woman——"

Roach, a bully toward most persons, was an abject

coward in the presence of the tiny woman whose body he could have crushed to death between his two great hands. He subsided into silence that was not broken until the arrival of the village doctor, who entered the room heralded by young Tom.

"I'm sorry to hear there has been an accident," said the physician, after a short nod of greeting to Mrs. Roach.

"Oh, yes, doctor, and it was enough to 'a' killed me. You know how nervous I am. I am sure I should not wonder if I should die from it. But it was all *his* fault! He might have known she would have fallen down and broken her neck. Will you just feel my pulse and give me something?" querulously demanded the woman.

"Yes, ma'am—yes, presently, when I have looked to the girl. This is she, I suppose?" said the doctor, stooping down to examine the insensible form at the foot of the ladder.

"She's the new bound girl, doctor. Come to-day, and the very first time I tried to get any good out of her she must fall down and break her neck! I'm the most *tried* woman——"

"Her neck is not broken, madam; but she is stunned by a concussion of the brain from falling and striking the back of her head. She must be laid on a bed, Mr. Roach. Could not a cot be brought down and placed here for her accommodation?"

"Certainly, doctor. You say she is not killed? Thank the Lord for that!" said Thomas Roach as he climbed the ladder.

"And what is Tommy to sleep on if you bring down his cot?" querulously inquired the little sharp woman.

But her husband had disappeared through the trap-

door and did not hear her question, so the doctor answered it:

"He can sleep on the floor, ma'am. To do so will not hurt him, and the cot must be brought down here for the use of this child."

While the doctor spoke, a knocking and a bumping was heard above, and presently the feet of Tom Roach and the long side-rods of the folded cot were seen at the open trap-door above. With much difficulty the man engineered the cot down the ladder, and then it was stretched out in the middle of the parlor and hastily made up from bedclothes brought downstairs.

The insensible form of the child was laid on it, and the doctor proceeded to a more careful examination.

"There are no bones broken at all," he said. "Bring me a basin."

When the bowl was brought he stripped the left arm of the child and bled her.

As the blood began to flow, Nea opened her eyes and looked around.

"There! she will do now," said the doctor as he bandaged up her arm. "Bring me my saddle-bags in here, boy."

Little Tom ran out and soon returned with the saddle-bags taken from the back of the doctor's horse. It was the doctor's traveling drug-store.

He opened them and took out several vials, and asked for a wine-glass and a little water.

There was not a wine-glass in the house; but they brought him a tea-cup, and he compounded a composing draught for the patient and administered it himself.

"Now, then, let her be very quiet, and she will be all right in the morning," he said as he arose to leave the house.

"Doctor, you haven't felt my pulse! You haven't given me anything! And I am as nervous as an oyster. But it is always so. I am always the last to be thought of. I am the most *tried* woman on the face of the earth! Here, feel my pulse, doctor, and prescribe something for me."

The doctor took her wrist in his hand and said:

"Yes, your pulse is much too quick. I shall prescribe a sedative—(for the comfort of your family")—he added in his private thoughts, as he once more opened his saddle-bags and made up a mild mixture of compound lavender, which he left with the woman.

Meanwhile, Nea, under the influence of the Dover powder, slept profoundly, with a peaceful smile upon her face.

That smile had been lighted by a flitting glimpse of paradise she had caught when she first recovered consciousness and opened her eyes—it was the paradise of perfect and suddenly restored vision! This was the effect, and not an unprecedented effect, of the fall, the shock, and the concussion that had started the half-torpid optic nerve into full life and activity. But her consciousness was still a little confused, and so she made no sign, but, after swallowing the sedative, sank into repose, which soon deepened into profound slumber, in which she lay for hours.

She slept profoundly through the night and only waked up in the morning, when Mr. Roach walked heavily down the stepladder and threw open the shutters with a couple of clangs, letting in a flood of sunshine upon the face and form of the sleeper.

She sat up in bed, gaping and rubbing her eyes, and scarcely wide enough awake to wonder at her position.

"Well, my little girl, how do you find yourself this morning?" inquired the man.

"I don't know—where I am," replied the child, in some confusion.

"Well, I don't wonder as your brains is addled after such a fall as you had! We thought you was a goner, I can tell you that, my little girl!"

"I—don't know what you mean. I—don't know where I am," said Nea, slowly, as if trying to collect her faculties.

"Why, you are in the house of Thomas Roach, butcher, where you was left to stay by your gardeen yesterday, don't you know?"

"Oh, yes! so I was! and he was to come for me last night! Was I asleep when he came? Did I go to sleep in my clothes? How stupid of me! Why didn't he have me waked up? Has he gone back to the tavern? Is he waiting for me there? Will he come for me this morning, or must I go to him? Please tell me what I must do, sir! And, oh! I thank you very much for your hospitality to me!" said Nea, politely, as she looked about her, wondering with incredulous rapture at the sudden clear vision that had come to her.

Thomas Roach did not reply in any way, but sat staring stupidly at the girl.

"Please answer my questions, sir—please tell me!" pleaded Nea.

"Tell you *what,* my little girl? Heaven and earth and t'other place! I can't answer all at once!" exclaimed the man, with a dazed look.

"Well, where is my Cousin Neil? I mean my stepfather? Did he come last night?"

"Who? I don't know who you are talking about."

"The gentleman who left me here and was to have called for me last night."

"Oh, *him?* He never come back at all."

"Never come back at all!" echoed Nea, in surprise.

"Not him."

"Oh, then he must have come down from the mountain quite late at night, too late to come here to disturb the family. He must be at the tavern. Won't you be so very good as to take me there after breakfast, sir?"

"May be so, if you are well enough to go," doubtfully replied the man.

"Oh, *I* am well enough—of course I am! Why shouldn't I be?" said Nea, rising and standing up. "I don't know, either," she added, faintly, putting her hand to her forehead. "My head is dizzy—*very* dizzy. I wonder what makes it so? I wonder how I came to lie down in my clothes?"

"Is it possible that you don't remember what has happened to you, my little girl?"

"I know I came off a long journey and stopped at the Eagle Tavern with my guardian, and that he sent me home here with you, while he went up on the mountain. That is all I know. I must have been very tired to have lain down and gone to sleep in my clothes without remembering a word about it."

"You didn't lie down and go to sleep, my girl. You was picked up for dead and stretched out there on the cot and bled. Don't you remember that? Look at your arm, where the sleeve is ripped open and the bandage is put on."

"What—what is this?" inquired the child, staring with dismay at the stained bandage around the bend of her elbow.

"Don't you know you fell through that there trap-door?" inquired the man, pointing to the opening.

Nea stared up at it and shook her head.

A very sharp voice came down from above.

"Thomas Roach! Are you going to stop there talking to that child all day? Or are you going to make up the kitchen fire and hang on the kettle for breakfast? Tell me that!"

"My dear Jane——"

"Do hold your tongue and go and do as I tell you! You make me just as nervous as an oyster! But I am the most *put upon* woman and the most *tried* on the face of this earth!" scolded the little shrew, as she went on to dress herself, tramping over the bare floor above and making more noise than necessary.

"Lie down, child! Lie down! You're as white as a sheet, and 'ill fall down if you don't," said the man, as he passed out into the kitchen to obey his wife.

Nea sank down on the cot and tried to remember what had occurred, but all was confusion from the time of her fall.

Mrs. Roach came downstairs, pitying herself and finding fault with the rest of the world, especially with little Nea, lying pale and wan on her cot.

"I don't know what your guardian could have been thinking of, to foist such a poor, weak thing as you are on us, I'm sure!" she snapped, as she sat down in her little old rocking-chair and began to rock violently.

"I am very sorry, ma'am, to be so much trouble. I don't know how I came to fall and hurt myself," began Nea.

"Because you were a fool—that was the reason!" sharply replied the woman.

"I—I—think it was because of my eyes; I couldn't see very well."

"Your eyes! That's only an excuse! There's nothing at all the matter with your eyes!"

"There is nothing the matter with them now, ma'am. I can see—so well!—ever since I woke up!"

"Do hold your tongue. You make me as nervous as —as an oyster! What did your guardian *mean,* anyhow, by imposing such a thing as *you* upon us? *Tell me that!*"

"I'm so very sorry he did it, ma'am; but it will not be long before he comes to fetch me now."

"Oh! *won't* it, indeed? You'll soon find out all about that. Now, then! Why don't you get up? Are you going to lie there chattering all the morning? I want that there cot out of the way, and there don't seem to be anything the matter with you now."

"The"—Nea hesitated between truth and politeness for a moment, and then giving the victory to politeness, as too many of us do, added—"gentleman told me to lie still."

"Oh, he did!" exclaimed the "lady." "Well, I tell you to get up and wash your face and bestir yourself. One inwillid is enough in one house, and that's *me.* Get up!"

Nea, thinking her lines had fallen upon strange rather than pleasant places, got up to order, feeling a little dizzy in her head and uncertain in her feet.

"Now go upstairs—no, don't go upstairs, for you would fall down again like a fool. Go into the kitchen and tell Roach to show you where to find a tin basin and a crash towel to wash your face with, and then come in here and see if you can't do something to earn your keep."

Nea, wondering much at the new and strange people she had fallen in with, obeyed, wishing in her secret heart that "Cousin Neil" would soon make his appearance and take her away.

She asked the "gentleman" in the kitchen, who was busy paring potatoes for breakfast, where she could find the articles; and when she had been provided with them and had made use of them, she returned to the dingy parlor, or sitting-room, and said to the sallow little hypochondriac in the rocking-chair:

"I am ready to do anything that I can do to help you ma'am."

"Well, then fold up them bed clothes on that cot. Do you think I want to turn my parlor into a horsepittle?"

Nea obeyed and folded every piece neatly.

Then the woman, raising her shrill voice, shrieked for "Roach" to "come and carry that there cot upstairs. It made her as nervous as an oyster to see them bed things in her parlor."

The man obeyed the small vixen as promptly as the child had done.

When the room was cleared and the table set, the children came down from the attic above, and the boy came in from the shop in front, and the family had breakfast.

Nea, still giddy and nauseated from the fall, could eat nothing, but left the table and went to the shop door to look up the street to see if she could see her Cousin Neil coming.

CHAPTER IV

NEA LEARNS HER FATE

The Roaches, taking advantage of her temporary absence, talked of her.

"You might as well tell her the truth at once, Thomas Roach. Let her know she is a bound girl and nothing better, and has got to go right to work to earn her vittels and close," said the woman.

"Oh, no, not yet; it would be too much of a shock. Her guardian did not want *that*. He wanted it to be broke to her gradual like," said the man.

"I don't believe she is going to earn her *salt*. There! And you may think it very well to be acting a deceiver's part, but what would your class-leader think if you was to tell him? Answer me *that*, Thomas Roach."

"But, my dear, a case of—of—necessity like this—leastwise—if not a case of necessity, a case of mercy——"

"Hold your tongue, do! You have no consideration for me in my state of health. You make me as nervous as an oyster! And there—there comes the doctor!" said Mrs. Roach, as the village practitioner entered through the shop, leading little Nea by the hand.

"Good-morning. Well, I think my little patient is nearly right now. She tells me that she felt giddy on first rising, but does not feel so at present," said the doctor, putting his hand kindly on the head of the little girl.

"Oh, *she's* well enough. But I wish you would attend to me, Doctor. I feel very poorly to-day," said Mrs. Roach, irritably.

"Ah, I am sorry to hear that. What is the matter now?"

"Oh, they worry me so. Everybody worries me. I am just as nervous as—as an oyster."

"Ah, that's bad. I must send you something," replied the doctor, reserving to time to reflect what sort of a perfectly harmless mixture he could mix up for this selfish little hypochondriac.

He was very busy that morning, he added, and declining the seat that had been offered him, he bowed and left the house.

"Do you know how to wash dishes? Are you good for anything at all?" crossly inquired Jane Roach of the little girl.

"Oh, yes, ma'am, I can wash dishes," replied Nea, who, in the last year, when her sight had improved, had been used to help her mother in washing the fine china, which was never intrusted to the careless hands of servants.

"Well, then go in the kitchen and get a pan of hot water and a tea towel and wash up these things, so I can watch you and see you don't break them."

"Yes, ma'am," politely replied Nea, wondering more and more at the rudeness of her hostess, and wishing heartily that her Cousin Neil would come and take her away. He could not be long *now,* she thought, for they had to set out on their return journey to Alexandria to be in time for the steamer that was to take them to Norfolk to meet the ship by which they were to sail for Liverpool.

She returned to the parlor with the pan of hot water and towel and began her task, her new mistress watching her closely, and snapping at her every few minutes.

When Nea cleared the table, put away all the crock-

ery ware in a corner cupboard, and make the sitting-room tidy, all under the direction of Mrs. Roach, she ran out again to the front door of the shop to look up the street to see if her Cousin Neil were coming.

Thomas Roach was just entering from the street.

"Oh, sir," said Nea eagerly, "I want—I want my Cousin Neil! Can't I just run up now to the Eagle Tavern and see what keeps him?"

"My little girl, I have just come up from the Eagle, where I have been to deliver the beef and mutton for the dinner—which if it wasn't for the custom of the Eagle I couldn't manage to live no how, and don't live very well with it any how——"

"And did you see my Cousin Neil, sir?" anxiously interrupted Nea.

"No, my little girl, he hadn't got back there."

Nea stared at the speaker in silent dismay for a few seconds, and asked:

"Not got back since he went on the mountain?"

"No, my little girl, not since he went away yesterday morning."

"Oh! *why* hasn't he come back? *Where* can he be? *What* can have happened to him?" inquired Nea, pale with fear and anxiety.

"Ah, my little girl, that is more than man can tell!" replied Roach.

"Oh! oh! Can anything have hurt him or *killed* him?" cried the child, in growing distress.

"Let us hope not, my little girl," said the man, putting her aside as he passed into the shop to take his place behind the counter.

"THOMAS ROACH!" shrieked a sharp voice from the back parlor.

"What, my dear?" responded the man.

"Send that girl right in here to *me.* She's got to know the truth, now or never. Come here you, Nelly Cross, or whatever your name is."

"Go, little girl, go! you had better mind what she says! She's inguns when she gets her temper up," whispered Roach, leaning over the counter.

Nea, trembling with an excess of anxiety, inspired by the woman's words: "She's got to hear the truth now," passed into the back-room, where the sharp-visaged and sharp-voiced little woman was still rocking nervously back and forth in her shabby little chair.

"Now, come here, Nelly, and stand right in front of me, and look me straight in the face."

Nea obeyed and raised her soft, brown eyes to meet the bright little black ones of the woman.

"Did you think your guardian was ever coming back for you?"

"Why, yes, ma'am! he was going to take me to Paris to have my eyes treated," sobbed the child.

"Your eyes again! There's nothing on earth the matter with your eyes, and there never was! And if your guardian told you he was going to take you anywhere he deceived you. He brought you here and bound you to us, for a servant, until you are eighteen years old, and he has left you here and gone back to where he came from! And now you've got the whole truth."

Nea shrank back and stared at the speaker in a sudden dismay, that turned her very lips white. Then throwing up her hands, and clasping her head she cried out:

"Oh, no, no, no, no! It is not so! It is not so! Cousin Neil would never do such a wicked, wicked,

wicked act!" and sinking down on the floor, she fell into a paroxysm of the wildest anguish and despair.

"Good Lord! Stop that! you mustn't go on that way! Do you want to kill me with your tantrums? STOP THAT, I SAY!" screamed the "nervous invalid," showing a great deal of nervous energy as she flew at the prostrate girl, jerked her up on her feet and shook her vigorously.

Zora Roslyn's gentle child ceased her wild lamentations and tried to suppress her tears and sobs as the virago gave her a final shake and shoved her down on another chair, where she sat, gasping for breath.

Mrs. Roach sank into her rocking-chair, grasped its arms, and leaned back, overcome by the violence of her exertions, panting, groaning, and crying:

"Thomas Roach! Come to me directly! This girl you brought here has almost killed me! *I'll* pay her for it! Go in the yard and catch a chicken and kill it to make me some broth! I want something to support me right away, now!"

The obedient husband, glad to get out of his wife's presence, called to Tommy, who had just re-entered the door, to go behind the counter and mind the shop, and then he went out to do her bidding.

Little Nea, watching her opportunity, slipped out after him, and asked:

"Oh, is it true, sir? is it true?"

"What true? Don't begin and make another fuss."

"Is it true that my guardian has bound me to you until I am eighteen, and abandoned me?"

"Yes, that's true *as* true. Now, don't begin to make another fuss! If you do, you know, it will be the worse for you. Be a good girl and you'll get good treatment. You'll be sent to Sunday-school with the other children

and taught to read. Now, wipe your eyes, and go in and try to please the ole 'oman. You gived her an awful shaking up just now with your row!" said Mr. Roach, who was engaged in picking the slaughtered chicken.

Nea, with one shuddering sigh, ceased to weep and sob; not that her sorrow was lightened, but that her paroxysm of excitement was exhausted.

She returned te the parlor, still too confused by anguish and despair to think how she should meet this great change in her life. She felt that there was no help for her in man; she prayed silently that the Lord would help her.

She saw lying on the old faded carpet the little valise that had been sent from the tavern, and that contained her night-clothes, combs, brushes, and pocket-handkerchiefs that she had brought with her from Alexandria. Its presence seemed a visible and tangible confirmation of the miserable truth of her betrayal into bondage and her final abandonment by her guardian.

"Take that thing and carry it upstairs, and mind you don't fall headlong down again!" sharply ordered the woman in the rocking-chair.

Nea obeyed, ascending the ladder very carefully; and when she had reached the garret—which was divided into three small rooms, one behind the other, in the same order as the shop, the parlor, and the kitchen below—she set down her bag on an old chest, and kneeling down beside it, buried her face in her hands.

She remained there, numbed by despair, until the shrill voice of her mistress called her down to perform some other service.

Nea scarcely knew how she wore through that heavy day.

She could not eat anything at meal-times.

When night came she was told that she might go up into the garret and go to sleep in the back room, which was nothing better than a bare, unplastered loft over the small kitchen.

It would be painful as needless to follow in detail the life of the little girl for the next few weeks.

She was worked very hard; for Jane Roach never did anything, but direct and scold, if she could help it.

But there are few conditions so miserable as not to be ameliorated by some compensations.

Nea's eyesight had been wonderfully restored by the shock of her fall; and the child, in all her trouble, rejoiced in the clear vision. She was also sent to the Methodist Sunday-school, where she was learning to read; and in this privilege, so long desired by her, and so long withheld by blindness, she took great comfort.

But life was not prosperous with the Roaches. They had been long falling into debt for the very necessaries of existence.

They were also in arrears for rent, and their landlord had become importunate for his money.

So it happened that Thomas Roach, very much discouraged with his prospects, at length began to talk of moving to some city where, if he could not make his fortune as a master butcher, he might at least make a living as a journeyman.

And so, for the present, we must leave little Nea and take up the thread of our story which was dropped at Washington.

CHAPTER V

THE MIDSHIPMAN'S RETURN

It was on a fine December morning, just three years and three weeks from the date of his sailing for the East Coast of Africa, that Midshipman Lance Roslyn returned from his long cruise.

His ship, the *Porpoise,* had anchored at the Navy Yard at sunrise that day, and as soon as he got leave he came on shore and hurried off to walk to New Jersey avenue to surprise his friends at Shadow Hall.

He was now a fine young man, twenty years of age, with a tall and well-developed form, broad-shouldered, full-chested and straight-limbed. His hair had turned from flaxen to sunny brown, and his complexion from rosy to a ruddy bronze; his light blue eyes had grown darker, but had lost none of their boyish frankness and gladness.

His step was brisk, his air full of eager expectation, yet over his beaming countenance passed occasionally a shade of anxiety, which might have been deeper and more abiding had he not been blessed with a very sanguine temperament; for he had some cause for doubt.

He had not heard from his friends for more than two years, and the last letter he had received from them was six months old before it reached him.

The time of cruising on the far distant Indian Ocean and China Seas had been a season of utter silence as well as of exile from home.

When he had last heard from his friends, by a letter received at Cape Town, everything at Washington was going on very much the same as when he had left the

city, nearly a year before; and why might it not have continued to go on so for two or three years longer? he asked himself, as for the twentieth time, perhaps, since his landing his sunny spirit dispelled the clouds of uneasiness that gathered over him.

He hurried on, wishing that he could meet some acquaintance who could end his doubts.

But it was as yet very early in the morning, and the few people he met on the road were utter strangers to him.

As he passed over the Navy Yard Canal Bridge he began to whistle "Begone Dull Care," a new and popular melody of the day.

When he came in sight of the long row of tall poplar trees that stood before Shadow Hall on the opposite or west side of New Jersey Avenue he quickened his quick steps almost into a run, and soon reached the old-fashioned porch, with its rustic benches, and the black oaken door, with its fan-light above, and its iron dog's-head knocker.

As the reader has anticipated, Lance found his old home utterly deserted and desolate. He wandered through the grounds, trying to account, but in vain, for the unexpected condition of things.

He went out of the grounds by the side alley, and, after having closed and bolted the gate, he stood looking disconsolately up and down the avenue.

The houses opposite, where their old neighbors used to live, were evidently still occupied, for glimpses of flowing window curtains could be seen from the partly open shutters.

Lance might have ended his misery of suspense in five minutes by knocking at the front door of either of these houses and inquiring of the first person who came.

But he felt a strange reluctance to do this.

While he stood there, hesitating in his wretchedness, a negro man came slowly up from the direction of the river, trundling before him a wheel-barrow filled with buckets of lime and sand, trowels and whitewash brushes.

He stopped before the gate, took off his hat, and said, respectfully:

"'Morning', Marse Capt'in. Lemmy go inter de alley, please, sir."

"Good-morning, uncle," responded the young midshipman, giving to the old colored laborer the title of courtesy generally accorded them. "Do you know where the Roslyn family, who used to live here, have gone?" he next inquired, as he made way for him to pass.

The old negro let go the handles of his wheel-barrow and scratched his head before answering:

"Well, I don't, Marster, and dat's de trufe. Der ain't nobody libbed here for 'bout two year, I know, caze dere was a sign up to let all dat time, which it was only took down yisdy morning, and I was 'gaged to come and whitewash de walls and ceilin's, and my ole 'oman to scrub de floors and paints, for the new tenant," the darkey explained.

The young midshipman gave the old man a bright silver quarter for his information, received a cheap benediction in return, and then set out to walk down the avenue toward the wharf, with the intention of calling at Dr. Hamilton's office to make inquiries for his own absent family.

In five minutes he found himself in the doctor's office, where the proprietor sat reading the *National Intelligencer,* and waiting for patients, which, at this early

hour, were drawn from the ranks of the Navy Yard workmen on their way to their shops.

Now, when poor Lance was roaming through the deserted rooms of his old home at Shadow Hall, he had felt as if he had been absent at least a half a century; but now, on entering the family physician's familiar office, where everything remained unchanged, he felt as if he had never been away at all.

The cordial doctor, on seeing the young midshipman enter, sprang up and dropped his paper, exclaiming, as he grasped his hand:

"Lance, my dear boy. This *is* a surprise! I am so glad to see you! Sit right down here and tell me how you find yourself! You look uncommonly well!"

"Thank you sincerely, Doctor, for this warm welcome! Yours is the first friendly face I have seen and the first friendly voice I have heard since I landed this morning," said the young midshipman, gravely, and with questioning in every tone and glance.

"Ah! yes, yes, yes, it must have been very sorrowful for you to come home and find them all gone," said the doctor, sympathetically.

"But *where* have they gone?" inquired Lance, in an agony of suspense now, for the doctor's tone and manner gave new alarm.

Dr. Hamilton looked at him now in surprise and compassion.

"My dear boy, is it possible that you do not know?—When did you hear from your home last?" he suddenly broke off to inquire.

"Not for two years, and then the letter was nearly six months old. They were at that date all well and going on as usual at Shadow Hall, with no thought of change. I got the letter at Cape Town. Since that time, for two

years, I have been cruising on the East Coast of Africa, on the Indian Ocean and China Seas," exclaimed Lance, speaking hurriedly, breathlessly.

The doctor dropped his head upon his breast and said nothing.

"For Heaven's sake tell me what has happened? Where have they gone? And little Nea? what of her?" vehemently demanded Lance.

"Little Nea is well, for aught I know. She is in Paris, or was there, having her eyes treated by the French oculists."

"Little Nea in Paris to have her eyes treated! That I know was the dream of her mother! Now I understand it all! Nea and her mother gone to Paris, and so, of course, the house on New Jersey Avenue is given up! But how did they get the means, and when did they go?" eagerly inquired Lance.

"My dear boy, Nea is not with her mother in Paris, but with her step-father, Mr. Neil Carnes——"

"'Her step-father, Mr. Neil Carnes!' *Nea's* step-father, Neil Carnes! You do not mean to say that my father's widow married a third husband!"

"It was by the advice of all her friends, and the event has proved it to have been a very judicious measure."

"She is happy with Neil Carnes, then? I should not have thought him capable of making any woman happy."

"She is happy, Lance!" very gravely replied the doctor, "as happy as it is possible for any faithful Christian woman to be. She is happy beyond the power of fate to make her otherwise. Zora Carnes is in heaven, Lance!"

"Oh!" groaned the young man, covering his face with his hands.

There was silence in the office for a few minutes, and then the youth burst forth in a wail of sorrow:

"She so young, so beautiful, so lovely in every attribute! Why did she die so soon? She always had a presentiment of early death! Every one used to laugh at her for it! And now it is fulfilled! Now it is fulfilled!"

"A mere coincidence, my dear boy. Where one presentiment is accidentally fulfilled there are thousands *un*-fulfilled."

"And she left her child to the guardianship of Neil Carnes! And he has taken her to Paris to have her eyes treated! Well, I suppose it was very kind of him. But I never did believe Neil Carnes capable of a generous or disinterested act! I suppose I have been unjust to him."

"I think you have, if such have been your thoughts. He seems to have been as much devoted to Nea as if she had been his own and only child. She grew very fond of him. He sacrificed good business prospects when he took her to Paris in the hope of restoring her sight."

"How long has this been ago?"

"All that I have told you has happened within the last two years."

"All since I received that last letter, at Cape Town, which hinted nothing of this. But, then, indeed, it was six months written when I got it."

"Probably, when there was no thought of these changes," said the doctor.

"No, none," sighed the midshipman, adding: "I had, indeed, feared some changes had taken place during two years and a half of absence and silence, but dreamed of none so great as these. Where is Eldiva, Doctor?—Mrs. John Daw, I should say, but the old

name comes more familiarly to my lips. Is she with her husband? Has he returned from his foreign travels, or has she gone abroad to join him?"

"Neither, my young friend. Mr. John Daw is still traveling with his father and their retinue—to the opposite ends of the earth now, I think, for when we last heard of them they were at Cairo, and were about to cross the Great Desert of Sahara."

"At Lord John Daw's age? Well father and son must be both equally mad," exclaimed the young man.

"My own opinion exactly," responded the elder.

"But my Cousin Eldiva. I left her under the protection of my step-mother and her aunt, Mrs. Roslyn. Where is she since the establishment at Shadow Hall was broken up?"

"She left Shadow Hall *before* the establishment was broken up. After the marriage of Mrs. Roslyn and Mr. Carnes, she found herself uncomfortable in the house and left it, being an independent spirited young woman, and took a situation as teacher in the Protestant Female Orphan Asylum on H Street."

"Eldiva, my Cousin Eldiva, teaching in an Orphan Asylum for her living!" exclaimed Lance Roslyn in astonishment.

"Yes, my dear boy, she is. In spite of the tears and prayers of all her friends, as I may say, she struck out to earn her own living in this way. I do not, for one, blame her."

"But I thought that Lord John Daw had made a handsome provision for her."

So his lordship *had;* but as his lordship had carried off her husband from her, she would accept nothing from his lordship's hands. And I, for one, do not blame her."

"But Eldiva had so many relatives who would gladly have given her a home."

"She had none upon whose protection she had any legal claim. And kind as they all were, the abandoned, humiliated wife did not wish to become a dependent on their charity."

"Her present position must be a deep mortification to her proud friends."

"I don't see why, I confess."

"A young lady of her rank!" exclaimed the midshipman.

The doctor shrugged his shoulders without reply.

"Do you know when Mr. Carnes is expected to return with Nea?" next inquired Lance.

"I do not, indeed, my dear boy. I never hear from them."

"Do you know what success has attended the treatment of her eyes by the French oculists?"

"No, I do not, my young friend. I repeat that I never hear from them. Mrs. John Daw, whom you will find at her post in the asylum on H Street, can probably give you all the information you require on that head," said the doctor.

This was not intended as a hint for the visitor that it was time to retire, though a pair of patients were waiting in the hall to consult the doctor in his office, nor did Lance take it as such; yet he arose to depart.

The doctor also arose, saying:

"Your ship is at the Navy Yard, I think you told me."

"Yes, sir; she cast anchor off there this morning."

"And what are your present prospects and intentions?" kindly inquired the doctor.

"I expect to have a short leave soon, and afterward to be stationed on duty at the Navy Yard."

"Well, my boy, when you get your leave, I hope you will come and make your home with us whenever you are in the city," said the doctor cordially.

"I thank you very much indeed, sir, and I should like to come some time when you are disengaged, to hear more in detail the family history of dismantled Shadow Hall for the last two years, for this morning I have only heard, as it were, the head lines."

"Come any time you will, my boy, and when I have opportunity I will tell you all I am able to impart," replied the doctor.

Then they shook hands cordially, and the young midshipman left the office and turned his steps up the avenue for the long walk to the asylum, where he expected to find his Cousin Eldiva.

Breakfast was just over at the asylum; two of the elder girls, whose turn it was on that day to wash the dishes, were engaged in clearing away the table; the rest of the children were in the yard, enjoying their half-hour of out-door exercise, and making the most of it before the nine o'clock bell should ring them in to their studies, and the teacher was seated at her desk in the school-room, mending pens and setting copies; for, mind you, the day of steel pens and copper-plate slips had not yet dawned upon a benighted world, and goose quills were used for writing; tinder-boxes, with flint and steel, for lighting; and old-fashioned blunderbusses and horse-pistols for fighting; with all sorts of crude instruments for common use.

Eldiva had mended all her quill pens and nearly finished setting her copies.

She had, in fact, just written the last one at the head of the first page in Minty Westcott's new copy-book:

"Virtue Rewards Her Followers,"

and was looking at it askance, with a doubtful mind, when one of the girls ran excitedly into the schoolroom holding out a card, and crying:

"Mrs. Daws!" (the children always put an "s" to her name) "Mrs. Daws! Here's a captain in uniform come to see you at the front door, and told me to give you this."

Eldiva came down from the little platform on which her desk was raised, took the bit of pasteboard, and read:

"Lancelot Roslyn, U. S. N." and started and ran out of the schoolroom as if she had been the youngest pupil instead of the grave teacher.

She found Lance standing just within the hall door, which was closed behind him.

"Oh, Lance! my darling, darling boy! how delighted I am to see you!" she cried, throwing her arms around his neck; and to prove her "delight," she burst into tears and sobbed on his shoulder.

But, then, he was her double cousin, and even as a younger brother to her.

He held her close to his bosom and tried to keep from crying for company; but he could not speak a word.

"Oh, my dear! Come in! Come in! Oh, Lance, there is no one left now but you and me! Only you and me, of them all, dear Lance! Have you heard? Have you heard?" she exclaimed, as she raised her head from his shoulder and seized his hand to draw him into the parlor.

"Yes, Diva, dear, I have heard all—at least I have heard the worst!" he replied, as he sat down at one end of the horse-hair sofa, while she sank, white and breathless, on the other.

Then followed rapid questions and answers, comments, ejaculations that need not be repeated, in full, as for instance:

"When did you get in?"

"How have you been, Lance?"

"Why have I not heard from you, Diva?"

"Oh, Diva! How could you grieve your friends by taking so humble and inferior a position as this?"

And so on.

When all these natural questions had been asked and answered, and Eldiva had given a somewhat detailed account of the marriage between Neil Carnes and Zora Roslyn, and of the subsequent death of the poor lady; and the breaking up of the household at Shadow Hall, and the departure of Neil Carnes and Nerissa Lovel for Europe; and Lance had listened with almost as much emotion as if he had not heard the heads of this story from Dr. Hamilton; then Eldiva arose and said:

"Sit here, dear Lance, until I ring my children into school and get them in order, under the care of a monitress, and then I will return. I have still so much to tell you!"

"And I so much to ask you!" answered the young man.

Eldiva rang the bell that called in her children, got them seated at their studies, placed Caroline Hopkins, the eldest and steadiest of them all, in her seat, as monitress, and with a little injunction to them all to be good while she was gone, left them to the care of her young substitute and returned to her cousin in the parlor.

"First, dear Diva, I wish to ask if you are happy, if there is any hope of a reconciliation with your husband?" began Lance, when she stopped him:

"You are greatly mistaken, as well as all the world. There is no quarrel between me and my husband, not the slightest, not even a misunderstanding, and I look forward to some happy time in the future, when there shall be a blessed and joyful reunion between us," she earnestly asserted.

"Well, then, I am very glad to hear that; but—I am puzzled!" said Lance, clearly showing his deep perplexity by looks as well as by words.

"Yes, you are puzzled no doubt, as are many people; and you must remain puzzled, as they must, for the present. There are circumstances that I cannot now explain; that I may not for years be able to explain, and my conduct and my husband's past conduct must remain a present mystery," said Eldiva, solemnly.

"But if there is no misunderstanding between yourself and your husband, if you look forward to a happy reunion with him, as you say, why do you not avail yourself of Lord John Daw's ample and very proper provision for you? It seems scarcely fitting for Mrs. John Daw to be filling an inferior and humiliating position as this of a teacher in the Orphan Asylum."

"Lance! I might truly answer you that the care of the moral and mental training of these motherless little girls is neither inferior nor humiliating, but the very opposite of that. But Lance, I wish to impress upon you that this subject we have just been discussing must be *dropped, here* and *now,* and *never* recurred to again," solemnly concluded Eldiva.

"Very well. You know best. We will talk of Ner-

issa. There can be no objection to bringing *her* upon the tapis, I hope?"

"None whatever. Let us talk of Nea," amicably replied Eldiva.

"Did she go willingly abroad?" inquired Lance.

"More than willingly—eagerly, anxiously; for besides her desire to have her sight restored and to see foreign countries, she had an idea that she would be nearer to you and possibly meet you on the other side."

"Poor little Nea! Dear little Nea! And have her expectations in the first instance been fulfilled? Has her sight been benefited?"

"It has been quite restored, I am happy to say."

"Then why has she been kept abroad by her stepfather?" curiously inquired Lance.

"Well, you know her education was very backward—so very backward on account of her infirmity—and Neil Carnes has placed her in a French convent school to study. She likes it very much."

"You hear from her often?"

"Quite often, considering the uncertainty of the mails. Neil Carnes writes every fortnight, occasionally inclosing letters from Nea."

"'Letters from Nea?' She, has learned to write then!"

"Oh, yes! She has been in the French school more than eighteen months—in fact, ever since her sight was restored—and has made great progress there."

"Indeed, I am very glad to hear it, though I was at first so deeply disappointed at not finding her at home. I should like so much to see the child's letters," said Lance.

"Well, you shall have them. I will go and get them now," said Eldiva, as she left the room.

Lance arose and walked up and down the floor.

Eldiva soon returned with about a dozen letters in her hand.

"You will observe," she said, as she handed them, "that the first are the crude efforts of a new beginner, but they constantly improve in style, and the last are quite creditable performances. Look at this one, for instance, that I received last week."

Lance took the letter she selected, and after glancing at the superscription said:

"*This* would seem the work of an accomplished penman. It is like copperplate. I am very glad to hear of little Nea's brightened prospects; but I do not see where Carnes gets the money to support Nea at school and himself at Paris."

"Oh, he has an extensive newspaper correspondence which pays him well, and he translates for several publishers. Besides, you may have heard that a single man may live very comfortably on a very little money in Paris, and that there are excellent convent schools there that are quite inexpensive."

"I suppose that explains it," said the midshipman.

"And now, Lance, my dear, I must send you away. My time is not my own. Take these letters of Nea's and read them at your leisure. To-morrow is Sunday. Come, if you can, and spend the whole day. Come early and go to church with us," said Eldiva, rising, and holding out her hand.

Lance also arose, saying:

"Well, I will go; but oh, you don't know how desolate I feel, Diva! This is a dreary home-coming!"

"Yes, it is, poor boy! Where are you going now?"

"Back to my ship. I have no other place to go. To be sure, Dr. Hamilton invited me to his house, but I do

not know that my presence there would be convenient or acceptable to the ladies of the family, so I shall return to my berth in the old *Porpoise.*"

"Poor Lance! Why don't you go call on your old friends, the Norths? You know that you are sure of a welcome there from ladies as well as gentlemen," said Eldiva.

"The Norths? What, are they still here?"

"Yes, but the general is not on duty. He has been placed on the retired list; but he is still occupying his house, The Poplars, on Greenleaf's Point."

"Oh, indeed! Well, I will go and see them. Is Imperia married yet?"

"No; you know the obstinate old gentleman's law, that no daughter of his shall ever marry until she is twenty-five years old? Well, he does not repeal it, and the consequence is that Captain Milo Yorke is still patiently waiting for the happy day to come. Good-by, now, dear Lance. I hate to drive you away, but I must, you see," said Eldiva, standing on tiptoes and putting up her lips for the parting kiss.

Lance gave it heartily, and then took up his cap, saying:

"This is the second time within two minutes that you have ordered me to go. I had better not wait to be kicked out, so I will be off. Good-by!"

Lance walked from H Street to Pennsylvania Avenue, crossed it, and stood looking southward over the wilderness of marsh, scrub, and brush that lay between that and Greenleaf's Point.

"I reckon I might just as well take a bee-line to the river and follow the beach until I get to the Point," said the young midshipman, glancing down at his strong

leather boots as if to gauge their strength to tackle with the thorns and briars of that pathless tangle-brush.

"Well, I reckon I had just better take a bee-line," he repeated, as he set out at a brisk pace.

An hour's rapid walk brought him through to rather higher ground, called Brick Kiln Fields, on which the relics of the old abandoned brick-yard that had once been the property of his father, were strewn around in all directions.

Passing through this, with a sigh given to sad memories, he came to another scene of desolation—a row of two-story, six-roomed little brick houses, called the Twenty Buildings.

These had been originally erected to accommodate the workmen then in the neighboring brick-yard, and other brick-makers, whom it was supposed the rapid growth of the new city would gather to the locality.

But there was no rapid growth then nor for many years after, and the whole scheme was a failure. The projector of the enterprise had become bankrupt. The brick-yard fell into disuse, and the untenanted houses in the Twenty Buildings into dilapidation.

They were now given over to the poorest of Scotch and Irish emigrants, and they presented a most squalid and forlorn appearance, with their dingy fronts, broken windows, rickety doors, and mouldering floors.

The Twenty Buildings ran north and south, facing the east. But the morning sun, now half way to the zenith, and shining full upon them, brought little cheer to any there unless to the groups of ragged children that were playing upon almost all the door-steps.

At the lower end of the row there was a pump in front of the last house, and at this pump stood a girl of about fourteen years of age, who seemed to be clothed in

but one garment—a coarse brown serge gown that clung close to her thin form all the way down to her bare feet and ankles—bare in the month of December! This girl had just pumped a large pail of water, and was standing, panting for breath, and resting, before attempting to lift her burden.

As Lance approached the spot he looked at her. How forlorn she seemed. Her dark brown curls, uncared for, straggled down each side her thin, pale face; but poverty and neglect could not destroy the beauty of the dark, tender eyes, or the elegance of the eyebrows, or the loveliness of the full, pouting lips.

The girl stood staring at the stranger with the half shy, dazed look of some children under such circumstances, until a sharp voice called from inside the door:

"You, Nelly!—you good-for-nothing, lazy, idle limb you!—how dare you stand gaping and staring there? You make me as nervous as an oyster! Bring that bucket of water in directly, or *I'll* give you something to remember!"

The girl started violently, lifted the pail of water and lugged it into the house.

"Good Heaven!" exclaimed Lance, as he strode on his way, "how that forlorn creature there reminds me of my own little Nea!"

CHAPTER VI

HAUNTING EYES

The young midshipman walked on, haunted by the vision of those soft brown eyes, so wondrously like the beautiful darkened orbs of his beloved little Nea.

"What surprising resemblances there are in this world," he mused. "There was that young student I once saw at the Commencement of Georgetown, that was as much like Mr. John Dow as if he had been his twin; and yet they could have been nothing to each other, not even fellow-countrymen. And now here is this poor little beggar, so like my own little Nea that she makes my heart ache. Poor little, sick, half-starved and half-naked child! What can she have in common with my dainty and cherished Nea who is now being educated in Paris? Scarcely, indeed, the same humanity. Ah, well! I would like to give that poor little woman shoes and stockings, and a whole gown, if I might; but I dare say that virago who was screaming after her would take any voluntary offer of assistance as an insult. I—think I must contrive to do it somehow, though," he mentally added, as he strode on up Windmill Hill, and over it, and down again toward Greenleaf's Point.

It was high noon when he came in sight of the arsenal buildings of glaring red brick, surrounded by its rows of cannon and pyramids of cannon-balls, with the glittering blue river behind, and the variegated late autumn woods of Maryland far beyond.

But his old friend was no longer in command at the arsenal.

The retired veteran lived at his handsome villa, the Poplars, which was situated in its own beautiful, shaded grounds on the river banks, not far from the arsenal.

To this place Lance turned his steps and entered the grounds by the small iron gate used by pedestrians.

A negro boy was lazily raking the fallen leaves from the well-kept grass, which was still green.

"Why, hello, Gideon, is that you?" inquired the young gentleman.

"Law, Marse Cap'in, how yer scared me! I's moughty glad to see yer, dough!" exclaimed the boy, dropping his rake and running forward.

"Is the general at home?" inquired the midshipman, after shaking hands with the boy.

"Yes, Marse Cap'in, dey's all home. I'll run roun' and open de door for yer quicker'n anybody else can. 'Deed, Marse Cap'in, I's moughty proud to see you!" exclaimed the boy, skimming over the lawn and disappearing around the rear of the house.

By the time that Lance had leisurely walked up to the front porch, the hall door was open and the boy standing, with a broad grin, ready to take his hat.

"Did way, Marse Cap'in," said Gideon, opening a door on the left which admitted the visitor into a medium-sized, cozy parlor, where, in an arm-chair, between a table covered with books and papers and a bright wood fire in the open fireplace, sat the veteran General North, with his bald head and full gray beard bent over the newspaper that he held in his hand, and with his thin form wrapped in a flowered gown.

Down dropped the paper and up jumped the old man at the sight of his visitor.

"Why, my dear boy! How delighted I am to see you! When did you arrive? How do you do?" and so on, and so on—all this while the veteran and the youngster were heartily shaking hands together and smiling in each other's faces.

"Here, now, take this armchair opposite to mine. And, Giddy, go and say to Miss North that Mr. Roslyn is here," added the old soldier, as he turned to the negro boy, who was still grinning with rapture in the doorway.

The boy vanished, and the veteran returned to the midshipman.

"Now tell me about yourself, Lance, lad. How have you been? Ah, poor boy, it must have been a sad home-coming for you!" he added, with a sigh.

"'Yes," sighed Lance, in a response. "I was unprepared for it! It was a shock to find Shadow Hall shut up and deserted; and then learn that my dear step-mother was dead."

"Not dead, Lance! Give up that form of expression. It keeps up a falsehood. 'Our Lord Jesus Christ hath brought life and immortality to light.' 'Whoso liveth and believeth in Him shall never die.' The Gospel is full of life, and yet Christians continue to talk of death!" said the veteran, earnestly.

"I know it is a bad habit of speaking," assented the young man; "but what else can we say to express the event?"

"Well—'passed away' or 'departed;' and yet these are not really true either; for our loved ones who have risen from the material life have *not* 'passed away,' nor 'departed,' nor left those who are in sympathy with them; they have changed 'in the twinkling of an eye,' from our bodily world to our soul world, and are, indeed, closer to us than ever before. Ah! here comes Imperia."

The entrance of Miss North cut short the disquisitions of the veteran.

There were more cordial greetings and then the conversation turned upon the midshipman's long voyage and other kindred matters.

At length the early dinner-bell rang, and the young man rose to go, but the veteran pushed him down in his seat again.

"Not a step will I let you go, sir! You are to dine

with us, and then let me send for your traps. You are to make your home with us, young man, until you shall be ordered on duty somewhere else!"

Lance laughingly yielded to force, but explained that he must return to his ship before sunset, as he had only the day's leave as yet.

The veteran took the youngster to a bedroom on the same floor, where the latter might brush his hair and wash his hands, and then led the way to the dining-room.

The short December afternoon passed pleasantly, and then Lance took leave of his kind friends and went back to his ship.

It was a week before the midshipman got another leave, and then he got a furlough for three months.

Christmas was near at hand, yet the weather continued to be mild, clear and beautiful.

Lance had made up his mind to go down to St. Mary's county, in Maryland, to spend his Christmas with his relatives there.

He wrote to tell them that he was coming, and then he went around to bid good-by to his city friends, promising each of them a visit of several days before his furlough should expire.

His last visit was to Eldiva at the asylum.

The lady received him as before in the parlor of the house; a bright wood fire was burning in the open fireplace, that diffused a pleasant glow over the bare floor, and the hard wooden chairs and tables.

"Well, Lance, I thought you would have been to see me before this," she said, as she handed her visitor a chair, and took another for herself before the blazing fire.

"Couldn't leave the ship for more than an hour at a

time, Diva. But now I have got a furlough for three months, and I am going down to spend Chrstmas at Bloomfield Farm with Uncle Well's folks. Ah, Diva, how I wish you could go with me! Why can't you, now? Your children have a holiday at Christmas like other children, I suppose?"

"Only a short holiday, Lance. Besides, as they do not leave the house, they require even more care in holiday time than they do while in school."

"But wouldn't the matron take full charge and——"

"Mrs. Dunn, dear soul, would take double burden and do double duty for any one under any circumstances; but besides my objection to make the holidays a term of harder work for her, I have an insuperable objection to going into company even among my own dear friends and relatives."

"But why should you, Diva?"

"Because of my painfully false position among women. And now let that drop. You are answered, Lance," said the young lady, speaking in a hard, metallic voice, not at all in harmony with her usually gentle mood and ever tender heart.

"I am very sorry, Diva. Very sorry. But I cannot help it, I suppose," sighed the young fellow.

"No, you cannot help it; so do not let it trouble you."

"Is there anything I can do in the way of taking letters or messages to our friends in St. Mary's?"

"Yes—no—I really don't know. It all depends on what time you start, Lance," hesitatingly replied the lady.

"I did intend to go to-morrow morning; but if you want time to get up anything, I will wait over a day," promptly answered the young man.

"Well, I would like to send a box of good cigars to

Uncle Jubal, and a new-fashioned dress cap to Aunt Joyce, and some gay bandana handkerchiefs to the colored folks."

"All right. I will take them with pleasure. And if you can buy them to-day, and let me call for them to-night, I needn't defer my journey."

"Thank you, Lance! but can I not save you the trouble of coming to-night by sending them somewhere to you?"

"Oh, yes, you *can,* if you don't want to see me again," replied the midshipman.

"You captious boy! I will punish your impertinence by compelling you to call in person for the luggage, and making it as large as possible. You can call for it any time this evening," said Eldiva.

"I will do so; and now, Diva, there is something else that had better be arranged by daylight."

"What is it, Lance?"

"I feel like doing something for these orphan girls here. What would the little imps like for Christmas presents, do you think?"

Diva hesitated and reflected.

"Now, don't say anything *useful,* because the asylum is bound to find them in every *useful* thing. Tell me something *playful* or *ornamental* that they would like," exclaimed the youth.

Eldiva laughed and answered:

"Every girl under thirteen would like a doll, I'm sure. Every girl over fifteen would like a gay ribbon."

"Ah! And the intermediate ages?"

"Would like dolls or ribbons, according to individual temperaments."

"Well, Diva, here is a twenty-dollar bill to make the

imps happy," said the youth, handing a bank-note to the lady.

"But——" began Eldiva, as she took the money.

"But what, now?" demanded Lance.

"Is not this a great deal to spend on mere toys, Lance?"

"What? Christmas toys for a whole asylum full of orphan girls? I call it but little."

"From a millionaire, perhaps; but from a young midshipman with his small pay——" suggested the lady.

"Look here, Diva! I have no widowed mother or orphan sisters to support, as some of my brother officers have; and I have no bad habits of smoking, or dram drinking, or anything of that sort; so that I can afford to do this. And I prefer to give dolls and ribbons because they will be sure to get more useful things."

"Very well, Lance. Your gifts will certainly make the little ones happy."

"Well, and now there is something else that I want to intrust to you."

"Go on, Lance."

"I want to commission you to buy shoes and stockings, and proper clothing for a poor, miserable little girl in the Twenty Buildings."

"Dear Lance, if you begin that sort of thing your pay will not go very far," smiled Eldiva.

"'*Shiver my timbers,*' as the old salts say, but it shall go as far as it can in this work! But this is really a crying case of necessity, Diva, dear."

"Who is this girl? One of those good-for-nothing Wathens?" inquired the lady.

"*N-o-o-o!*" almost indignantly replied Lance.

"You said she was in the Twenty Buildings, and the wretched Wathens live there. That is why I asked."

"Well, she is not one of the Wathens. I don't know *who* she is, and I don't suppose I should care, only that she reminded me so much of our little Nea, though she may be a year or two older than Nea. She looks to be about fifteen."

"Well, Nea is not far from that age."

"To be sure! So she is! I had forgotten! I was thinking of Nea as I last saw her three years and a half ago."

"But this girl?"

"Oh, she was so much like Nea! Diva, did you ever meet a person that was so much like some one else that the likeness not only struck you, but struck you breathless with amazement?"

"*Yes, I have,*" replied the lady, in a low voice; and if Lance had not been so much preoccupied by his own thoughts he must have noticed her face grow pale as she spoke.

"Well, I have, twice in my life. The first time was at the Commencement of Georgetown College, when I saw one of the students that was a counterpart—a perfect counterpart—of Mr. John Daw! Why, I tell you positively, if they two had been dressed alike, and stood up side by side, I could *never* have told one from the other. And now, this girl. Well, to be sure, she wasn't as much like Nea as the Georgetown student was like Mr. John Daw, for she had a taller and thinner form, and a longer and thinner face, and a paler complexion, and even darker hair, and her eyes had a more steady and penetrating look than poor little Nea's wistful darkened orbs; but still there was a touching look of Nea in that child which haunts me day and night, and makes my heart ache."

"Which of the Twenty Buildings does she live in?" inquired Eldiva.

"The house at the south end of the row, opposite to which stands the pump. You cannot miss it."

"But you don't know the name of the girl?"

"No; nor of the people she lives with. I fancy she is not their child. I fancy she is their servant, from all I saw. But you will inquire, Diva, will you not?"

"Yes, I will."

"You see, I might go myself, only I think, under the circumstances, it is better that a lady should go than a young man."

"Much better," asserted Eldiva.

"And take this ten-dollar bill to fit the child out comfortably, will you?"

"Lance! Lance! there are city charities and church charities that are bound to provide necessaries for the destitute——"

"*Then why don't they do it?* No, Diva, this is *my* affair. Mine; and I am my own master—twenty-one years of age my last birthday! *'Mind that!'* as the Irish say."

"Very well, Lance, dear. I will be your almoner, and dispense your alms with great pleasure," said Eldiva, smiling on the generous boy.

"And now, Diva, dear, I will go. What time shall I call for the gifts this evening?"

"Any time after seven o'clock. School hours are over at three. Then I shall go out to make purchases, and get back by six, which is our tea time; after which I have to assist at the evening prayers, and at putting the younger children to bed. By seven I shall be at leisure. By the way, how do you travel?"

"As I have some little luggage I shall engage a gig,

horse and man from Fuller's stables—the man for the sake of his taking the gig back at the end of the journey. Good-by, dear; I will be punctual," said Lance; and he kissed his cousin and left the house.

He also had some Christmas gifts to pack up for friends in the country.

He spent the afternoon at his work, and then went to get his tea at Fuller's, where he had taken a room for the night, and from whence he intended to start for St. Mary's in the morning.

Duly at seven o'clock that evening he presented himself at the asylum to take charge of the parcels to be intrusted to him by Eldiva, and after having received them he bade her a final good-by and left the house.

And long before even the early women of the Orphan Asylum were up, Lance was a mile or so over the Eastern Branch Bridge, on his way to Bloomfield Farm.

This was Thursday, just a week before Christmas.

On the evening of the next day, Friday, the Orphan School, like the others, broke up for the holidays, which were to last until the Monday after New Year.

On the Saturday morning, the first of the vacation, Eldiva went out to purchase the presents for the children of the institution with the money which had been left for that purpose by Lancelot Roslyn.

There was but one really good toy-shop in the Washington of that day. It was "Rachendorf's," the paradise of children.

Thither went Eldiva and made her purchases of dolls and candies, and having ordered the parcels to be sent to her address at the Protestant Female Orphan Asylum, she proceeded to Mrs. Lanckpheirs' millinery store, where she bought many yards of bright-red, blue, yellow, green, purple and orange ribbons, to suit all com-

plexions and tastes. These, as they did not make a very large parcel, she put in her ample reticule, as the handbags of that day were called.

Then, wishing to lose no more time in dispensing the young midshipman's more important alms, she looked at her watch, and finding it was but a few minutes after noon, she set out to walk to the Twenty Buildings to look after the poor girl whose case had awakened the sympathies of Lance.

The way was long, and the shortest cut took her over the very same ground that had been traversed by Lance; but the day was very fine, cool, crisp, with no indication of winter, yet, though this was the 19th of December, and Eldiva was a good walker, and as well shod for the expedition as her cousin himself had been.

She stepped out briskly from the avenue down one of the unopened streets and across the low-lying waste land already described as Frog Town.

It was even more passable now than ten days before, when the young midshipman's heavy boots had crunched through the dry brush. The ground was harder, the brush more brittle.

An hour's rapid walk brought Eldiva to Brick Kiln Fields, half a mile in the rear of Shadow Hall.

There she, too, sighed, as Lance had sighed, over the scene of failure and ruin. Then she came to the Twenty Buildings—the half dilapidated wrecks of the row of pretty red brick houses that had been built for the homes of the brickmakers, but were now abandoned to squatters.

She passed down the whole row, smiling on the groups of children collected in the open doorways, wishing that she had brought her pockets full of gingerbread for them, and resolving that she would in future come

provided with that cheap and easy means of giving pleasure to the poor little ones.

She reached the last house in the row, the house before which the pump stood, that Lance had given her as an index.

This house was the best one of the line. Its windows were all glazed, except in some few places where the missing panes of glass had been neatly replaced by clean newspaper pasted in. And the front door was on its hinges and well scrubbed.

CHAPTER VII

A STARTLING ENCOUNTER

But no one was in sight and the house was closed in front.

"Perhaps the family have moved away," said Eldiva to herself, as she stepped upon the little wooden stoop and knocked smartly.

The door was opened by a girl in an old brown serge gown that was too short for her, showing her bare ankles and feet and bare arms and wrists, and which clung so closely to her thin form that she seemed to wear nothing under it—a girl about fifteen years of age, with a slim, graceful form, a delicate, pale face, a wealth of curling, dark brown hair, elegantly turned dark eyebrows, lovely dark brown eyes, a fine, straight nose, a sweet mouth and round chin—a girl with feet and hands small and elegant as any lady's.

Eldiva at the first glance recognized the girl as seen and described by Lance. She noticed also the striking

likeness this girl bore to little Nea; but Eldiva had seen, she thought, even a stronger likeness between strangers, as in another instance cited by Lance.

She looked at the little girl for an instant without speaking, and then gently inquired:

"Can I see the mistress of this house?"

The immediate effect of her voice was magical. The girl started at its first tone, bent forward, listened, grew pale, and then exclaimed:

"Oh, Diva! Dear Diva! I'm so glad to see you! Don't you know me? Oh, Diva! don't you know me?"

"Nea! Nea! Great Heaven! Is this you? Is this indeed you? Heaven of heaven? How came you here?" gasped Eldiva, breathless with amazement.

"Oh, Diva! I am so glad to see you! Oh, thank the Lord for this! I thank the Lord for this!"

"But child! how came you here? Good Heaven! how came you to this pass? Where did you drop from into this bottomless pit?" cried the lady.

"Oh, Diva! I am so overjoyed to see you! I cannot tell you anything but this—I am so crazy with surprise and delight to see you!"

Here a sharp, rasping voice from within the house called out angrily:

"You, Nelly! Who are you standing talking to, at that door? Tell whoever it is to come in if they have any business, or to go away if they haven't!"

"Yes, ma'am," answered the child, changing color and beginning to tremble.

"Who is that?" sternly inquired Eldiva.

"Oh! she is Mrs. Roach, the woman Cousin Neil bound me to," whispered Nea, in a frightened tone.

"*Bound* you to?" inquired Eldiva, frowning darkly.

"Oh, yes! he took me hundreds of miles back into

the country and bound me out to her and her husband, and then slipped away and left me. It was all deception. But, oh! Diva, never mind that now. You have come to see me, and I am so glad! Oh, so glad to see you. How did you know I was here, dear Diva?"

"I did not know it. My finding you was chance, or Providence. I thought you were in Paris. Why, my child, I have been getting letters from Neil Carnes, dated Paris, telling of the recovery of your sight and of your progress at the school in which he had placed you, and even inclosing letters purporting to come from you."

"They are all deceptions and forgeries. I have never been out of the country."

"Did you not think you were going to France when you bid me good-by, Nea?"

"Yes, of course I did. But when I got to Alexandria I was lured into Virginia, and then bound out and deserted."

Again the sharp voice from within the house sounded an alarum:

"*You limb, you!* Will you shut that door and come in, or must I come and fetch you? If I have to come after you, *I'll* make you rue the day! You good-for-nothing, lazy, idle *limb,* you, I'll give it to you! You make me just as nervous as an oyster."

"I must go. Oh, Diva! I must go!" said the trembling child.

"Come, then. I will take you in to this woman and then take you home with me," said Eldiva, clasping the hand of Nea and leading her down the passage to the open back door of the room from which the angry voice had come.

It was the kitchen, evidently, and it was neatly kept.

The white delf ware and tin pans were all bright and clean, and regularly arranged on the well-secured shelves; the scant cotton curtain at the window was as white as snow, and the brick hearth was as red as the fire that burned in the open chimney.

In a shabby old rocking-chair beside the chimney corner sat a little, thin, cross-looking woman, clothed in a clean, dark calico gown, but without either cuffs, collar, or apron to set it off. She had a thin, sallow complexion, thin black hair, and sharp black eyes.

"You are Mrs. Roach, I believe?" said Eldiva, approaching the woman, and still holding Nea tightly by the hand.

"Yes, ma'am, that is my name," said the woman, looking a little startled at the sight of the visitor. "And it—I didn't know it was a lady at the door, else I shouldn't have—called out so impatient. But that bound gal of mine is so lazy, idle, and good-for-nothing, that I never can trust her—standing talking with Tom, Dick and Harry, until she makes me just as nervous as an oyster! Sit down, ma'am. Nelly hand the lady a chair, why don't you?"

"Thank you, I would rather not sit down. It is scarcely worth while. My business is with this young lady," said Eldiva, closing her fingers more firmly upon the hand of Nea.

"Young lady?" inquired Mrs. Roach, in surprise and disapprobation.

"Well, young girl—if you like it better," said Eldiva.

"Well, then, I *do* like it better, if you will excuse me for saying so, ma'am; for I don't hold with this indiscriminate way of calling all sorts of gals young ladies. It turns their heads and sets 'em above themselves. Nelly go out in the back yard and see what the children

are up to. Some mischief, I'll be bound! And little you care what it is, either. Go directly!" said Mrs. Roach, sharply.

Nea started to obey; but Eldiva's hand closing firmly on her wrist, detained her, while she said:

"I told you that I had business with this young lady."

"Oh! You are a 'Piscopal, perhaps?"

"Yes, but——"

"I thought you was! There has been two other 'Piscopals here after her already; but I told them, as I tell you, ma'am, and no offence: I know my duty by my bound gal, and I send her to Sunday-school myself. I have sent her regular ever since I got her bound to me. She couldn't read a word when she first came, nigh three years ago, when we lived up in Virginny, and now she can read her Bible as well as anybody in this world. So, thanking you all the same, ma'am, you have no call to come to get her to go to Sunday-school."

"I am not here with any such design. I came to take this young lady home with me," quietly answered Eldiva.

"Eh!" exclaimed the woman, staring.

"I say that I am here to take this young lady, Miss Nerissa Lovel, home with me. By her mother's last will, I am her guardian, the only one present who has any authority over her. Nerissa, go and get your bonnet and come with me," said Eldiva.

"Don't you dare to stir out'n this house! if you do I'll flag you alive!" shrieked the little woman, trembling with excitement.

The child, who had started to go upstairs, now stopped and stood, pale and terrified, in the middle of the floor.

"Nerissa, my darling, have faith in me. Do as I tell

you. I only have the right to give you directions here. To me only you owe obedience. Go and get your bonnet and come away with me," said Eldiva, quietly.

"Yes, Diva, I will! I will obey *you*. I know you tell me the truth, I am not afraid! exclaimed the child, darting away.

"Come back—*you—you—you limb of the Old Nick!* Who is this woman that wants to take you away from a good home? Come back, I say! Oh, *I'll* give it to you when I catch you!" exclaimed the irate woman, screaming after Nea; but as the girl was now out of sight and hearing, the vixen turned upon her visitor, demanding, in a very insulting manner:

"And pray who are *you,* I would like to know, ma'am, to come into a decent house like this to carry off our bound gal? Oh, *I* know you! For all of your fine airs! *I* know you? You are one of them flaunting Jezebels of the town that go about like roaring lions to entice young gals to their everlasting ruin!"

Eldiva made no sort of reply, took no sort of notice of this tirade, but walked serenely up to the window and looked out.

Her perfect calmness maddened the irritable little woman in the old rocking-chair.

"I'll have you took up before a magistrate for this! I'll have you sent to the work-house to pick oakum for this, as sure as my name is Jane Roach! *I'll* see if people like *you* is to come into honest people's houses and carry off their bound gals to the jaws of Satan! I will!"

Eldiva, looking out of the window, saw an old neighbor and friend going by. He was old Mr. Thomas Bowen, who had been county constable for the ward

ever since she had first come to Shadow Hall. He was a most fervent Christian and estimable man.

It occurred to Eldiva to call him to her assistance. She tapped on the window to attract his attention. He looked up and she beckoned him to approach, and as he crossed the street she went out of the kitchen and up the passage to open the front door.

"Well, my dear lady, what can Old Tom Bowen do for you?" demanded the genial old man, after he had given the "good afternoon" to his some-time neighbor.

"I wish you to come in this house to be a witness for me, and perhaps to enforce the peace," replied Eldiva.

"Why, this—is the home of my new sister in the church—Sister Jane Roach, who joined our meeting last Sunday, by letter from the church at Greenmont. She was 'pointed to my class, and I was just on my way to make her a visit when you called me."

"So much the better, Mr. Bowen! I am glad to hear you say what you do. You may perhaps be able to bring her to reason. Do you remember little Nea, our blind child?"

"Why, of course I do! What would ail me not to know her?"

"You haven't seen her for three years, remember."

"No, I haven't, and of course she'll be a little older and bigger than she was then, but I should know the dove-eyed darling all the same."

"Thank the Lord! And now, Mr. Bowen, one question more: Do you remember being called in to Shadow Hall one day to witness the will of the late Mrs. Zora Carnes?"

"Why, of course I do!"

"All right, then. Come in this back room with me!"

The old man came in, closed the door behind him, and followed the lady.

As they passed along the narrow passage the sound of an angry voice reached them from the rear room.

"Take off them things this moment, you jade! Go upstairs this minute and take them off! Oh! I'll cut your skin as fine as ashes when I get hold of you!"

At this very instant Eldiva opened the door and entered the room, followed by class-leader Thomas Bowen.

The virago was taken completely by surprise. With her claw-like, little hands grasping the arms of a rocking-chair she turned her head and stared at the newcomer.

"Good-day, Sister Roach, how do you do this morning?" was the calm greeting of the class-leader.

"Oh! Good-morning, Brother Bowen! Sit down, Brother Bowen."

The old man took a seat, put his hat on the floor at his right hand, and stood his stout hickory stick between his knees.

"But don't ask me how I do, Brother Bowen! I have been that *tried,* this morning! Look at that bound gal there!" exclaimed the woman, pointing with her little, skinny finger to Nea, who now, dressed in her Sunday-school clothes—a clean but coarse blue serge, with a deep cape of the same, and a quilted, black hood—stood terrified and hesitating at the foot of the steps.

"Yes, I see her sister. Come here, little girl, and let me look at you," said the old man, mildly.

"Yes! Go to the gentleman, Nelly. And, Brother Bowen, I hope you will give her some good advice. Oh! she's a regular bad one! She's Nelly Ross, a bound gal that was bound to us three years ago by her guardian, one Mr. Carnes. We lived in Virginny then, but we

brought her with us to the city about three weeks ago. And now, Brother Bowen, no sooner does she get in this city and get the *chance,* than she runs the streets and picks up all sorts of bad company; and here, this morning, comes this *fine lady,* who is trying to carry her off right before my two eyes to lead a life of sin! She must a' knowed Roach was gone out to look for work, and I was alone and unprotected, when she come here, bold as brass, to take my bound gal from a respectable home to some cave of Satan! Talk to her, Brother Bowen! Show her the error of her ways!"

"I will speak to the little one as soon as you have done, Sister Roach."

"Well, then, I have done *now,* Brother Bowen. But I don't see as the 'Postle Paul gave any orders how women must keep silent in their own houses. If they must in the meetings, 'specially when they are *that tried,* like I am. And *you* needn't stay any longer, ma'am! You must see *that* yourself. I've got a purtecter here who will see me righted!" said Mrs. Roach, turning sharply around on the lady.

But Eldiva, standing by Nea and old Mr. Bowen, took no notice.

"If you will allow me, Sister Roach, I will now speak to this little girl," said the class-leader.

"Well, speak, Brother Bowen. I hope she will listen to you. That's all," said Sister Roach, settling herself back in her chair for a rest.

Old Bowen set aside his big stick, and took Nea between his knees, facing him, looked at her attentively, and then said:

"Do you know me, my little girl?"

"Oh, yes, sir; you are Mr. Bowen, the constable, who used to live in the little two-story white house on the

same side of the avenue with us," replied Nea, with the instinct that she must tell all she knew.

"Yes, that is right."

"And Mrs. Bowen kept a candy shop in her front window, and sometimes you sold oysters," added Nea.

"Exactly. And now tell me *your* name."

"Oh, you know it, Mr. Bowen. It is Nerissa Lovel," smiled the girl, who felt that she was now safe.

"Exactly. It is Nerissa Lovel," said Mr. Bowen.

"It's a lie!" screamed the shrew, forgetful, in her madness, that it was her class-leader to whom she exposed her temper and used bad language.

"Sister! Sister Roach, my dear sister, 'Let your moderation be known unto all men.' 'Be angry, but sin not,' says the Holy Word," spoke this really religious old man, in a mild, admonishing tone.

"I'm *not* angry," shortly retorted the vixen. "I'm *not.* I never *let* myself be angry. I'm seeking sanctification, and you know it, Brother Bowen. Only 'Satan desires to have me, that he may sift me like wheat,' and so I'm tried. I'm *that tried!* And it is very uncharitable to say I'm angry. I thought you was a Christian, Brother Bowen. I did, else I never would have took *you* for a class-leader."

Brother Bowen answered not a word, but turned to Nea and inquired:

"How came you in this situation, Nerissa Lovel?"

"I tell you it's a lie. She ain't Nerissa—what's her name?—nor nothing else but Nelly Ross," fiercely interrupted the woman. "And she was bound to me and Roach till she was eighteen, by her guardian, and she's got three or four years to serve yet. And I'll see whether anybody dares to take her out of my hands before her time's out!" raged the woman in the chair. But

she was now raging herself into a state of exhaustion, which was one comfort. She sat back in her chair after this last blast and panted for breath. This gave old Mr. Bowen the opportunity to explain.

"Sister Roach," he said, gently, "you have been deceived. This little lady is really Nerissa Lovel, whom I have known ever since she was a baby; and this lady who has come to take her away has every right to do so, for she is the child's guardian, by force of her mother's will, to which I myself was a witness."

"It's a plot! It's a plot!" gasped the woman in the chair; but she could say no more.

"The man who bound the child to you was an impostor, who, for some reason that does not yet appear, lured her to Virginia and left her with you," mildly continued the class-leader.

"It's a wicked plot! And you're in it!" groaned the woman.

"This lady, the lawful guardian of this child, has the right to take her away at once, and she must be allowed to do so without hindrance," continued the old man, without noticing the interruption of the woman.

"I won't give her up! I won't!" exclaimed Mrs. Roach, working herself up into a frenzy again.

"My dear sister, if you attempt to hinder the girl's lawful guardian from taking her away, you may get yourself and your husband into very serious trouble as the *accomplice* of her abductor! Let her go quietly, Sister Roach," said the old man.

"Oh, my Lord in Heaven! was there ever a woman so *tried* as I am!" whimpered the virago, who was beginning to be frightened.

"I think, Mrs. Daw, that you had better take Miss

Lovel home with you at once," said Mr. Bowen, at this juncture.

"Wait till Roach comes home! Only wait till Roach comes home!" gasped the woman, again out of breath.

"*I* will wait until Brother Roach comes in, and I will explain the case to him. Believe me, sister, when he understands it he will be glad to be rid of it so easily," said Mr. Bowen.

"I thank you very much for the help you have given us, Mr. Bowen," said Eldiva, as she took the hand of Nea to lead her away.

The old man simply bowed in response to the lady's words.

"Good-by, Mrs. Roach. *Please* give my love to Tommy and Rachy and the two little ones," said Nea.

"Begone, you cat! and don't dare to speak to me! Wait till Roach comes! We'll see! Here I'm an—an—unpurtected woman among a lot of ruffians! But wait till Roach comes! *He* shall see me righted, or I'll know the reason why. And when I *do* get you back, you limb! won't I make you rue the day!"

With these angry words ringing in their ears, the lady led the little girl forth from the house of bondage.

Out in the glorious sunshine of that fine December day, Nea clasped her friend's hand and turned to her a face radiant with happiness.

CHAPTER VIII

A STRANGE DISCOVERY

Nerissa ripped along gayly by the side of Eldiva, keenly enjoying her liberty in the bright December sunshine.

"Nea, dear," said the lady, "I do not yet quite understand how it is that I found you in that position. I thought you were in Paris, with your sight restored. I thought you were at one of the best schools there, receiving an education, and that the letters I got, signed by your name, were written by yourself. And here I find you a bound servant, in a low, vulgar, miserable family. Oh, Nea, how did all this happen?" inquired Eldiva, nervously closing her hand upon the child's hand, as if in dread of again losing her.

"Diva, dear, it is a hard thing to say, but Cousin Neil deceived us all! I cannot think why he should have done so. If he did not like to have the burden of me himself, he might have left me with you, as you wished him to do, for I was an orphan and fit for your asylum," replied the child.

"Tell me all about it, Nea," said the lady.

As they walked along the narrow footpath leading through the old, deserted brickyard, and through Frog Town toward the city, Nerissa told the story of her abduction; how, when she had bidden good-by to Eldiva, at the asylum, Neil Carnes took her to Fuller's Tavern, where they stayed all night, and in the morning took her by stage to Alexandria, where it was understood that they were to sail by the packet for Norfolk, to meet the clipper and embark for Liverpool; and then how Neil Carnes contrived to miss the packet, and took her up into the mountains of Virginia, as he said, to pass the time pleasantly until the next packet should be ready to sail.

"And you had no suspicion of foul play, poor child?" inquired Eldiva.

"No, none; how could I have? I thought Cousin Neil was *so* good to me," replied Nerissa.

"Go on, dear! Tell me exactly what happened up in the mountains."

Nerissa then told of their long journey by stage to the mountain hamlet of Greenmont; their arrival early on the morning of the third day; Neil Carne's proposal to leave her under the protection of an acquaintance, while he went for a day's exploration to the top of the mountain; and how Roach and his wife came to the tavern after her, and received her at the hands of her stepfather, and took her home to their squalid house to spend the day.

"And still had you no misgiving?" inquired Eldiva.

"None at all. I thought it was a miserable place, and I was very sorry for the poor people that had to live in it, and I longed for the day to be gone, so that Cousin Neil would come and take me away," answered Nerissa, gravely, and then falling into silent thought.

"Go on, my dear; tell me all. When did you first suspect that you had been the victim of treachery?"

"I don't quite know. I thought from the first that Mrs. Roach was very rude *to a visitor;* but then I reflected that they were all poor, ignorant people, and perhaps they knew no better, and it was their way; so when she ordered me around so sharply I obeyed her, and thought it would only be for a day," replied Nerissa, with a sigh given to the graphic recollection of her troubles in the Roach household.

They had reached the thickest part of the scrub now, and had to scramble through it before the conversation could be resumed. Then Nea continued her story, and told how she had been ordered to go up the ladder into the loft over the kitchen to put away bonnets and shawls, and how in her partial blindness she had missed

her footing and fallen through the open trap-door to the floor beneath, and had lost consciousness from the shock.

"Great Heavens!" exclaimed Eldiva, indignantly. "Our cherished child to be subjected to such treatment."

"But that fall did me no real harm, Diva, dear; for when I came to myself in the morning I found that I had come to my sight also," said the child.

"Your sight, Nea! I perceived that your sight had improved, but I thought the process had been gradual, and that it was still incomplete," said the lady, stopping and turning around to look full in the child's eyes.

"No; my sight *had* been slowly getting clearer for years, you know, and up to the time that I fell through the trap-door and received that shock. Then, when I awoke from my stupor, I found my sight suddenly and completely restored. And I was *so* happy to be able to see that I felt as if I could bear anything else in the world. And I found I *had* a good deal to bear, too!"

"But, can you see so well, my darling? Come, let me test your sight. Look straight before you toward the north, and tell me what you see."

"I see a long stretch of dry brush and briar, reaching from here ever so far away to a long row of houses, with their backs toward us."

"That is the south side of Pennsylvania Avenue. You *can* see perfectly, Nea!"

"I can see the differences in the houses, too. Some are two-story, red brick houses, and some white frame, and some gray, and some yellow; and I can see red and white clothes hanging on a line in one of the back yards."

"That will do, child. You can see quite as well as I can. Let us walk on now, and as we go you can tell me the rest of your adventures," said the lady.

Nea told how she had watched and waited for the return of her cousin Neil, until at length Mr. and Mrs. Roach rudely informed her that she would never see him again; that he had bound her by indentures as a servant to them, to serve them until she should become of legal age, and that he had then left the neighborhood, not to return.

"Oh! what a base, cruel, cowardly traitor. I never trusted Neil Carnes, but I never could have suspected him of such a depth of villainy!" exclaimed Eldiva. "Go on," she added, seeing that the child paused to gaze at her.

Nerissa then told of her grief and despair on discovering that she had been betrayed into bondage, and abandoned by her cousin.

"And I thought of Joseph sold by his brethren, and how the Lord had taken care of him, and turned his captivity into good, and I tried to bear my fate. They were not bad to me. Mr. Roach and the children were almost always kind," added Nerissa.

"But the Roach woman was an imp, a vixen, a virago," indignantly exclaimed Eldiva.

"Oh, Diva, that was because she was tried, you know. She was never cross but when she was *tried,*" said Nea, naïvely.

"It seems to me, then, that whenever that sanctified creature was in a most diabolical fury she called herself *tried,* and blamed all the rest of the world rather than her own bad temper. Well, come, let us dismiss her case; it is too bad to talk about. Tell me how you came to Washington."

"Oh, but Diva, she was not *all* bad. Indeed she wasn't. She sent me to Sunday-school to learn to read; and she gave me time to get my lessons, too. And she

was sickly, poor thing; and that was the reason why everything *tried* her so. Why, she was just *as nervous as an oyster!*" said Nea, apologetically.

Eldiva turned with a humorous expression, and looked at the child inquiring:

"'As nervous as an oyster,' Nea? What do you mean by that?"

"Well, she *was;* she always *said* she was, any way," persisted the child.

"Then, of course, it must have been true. Now tell me how you came to this city again?"

"Mr. Roach couldn't make a living at Greenmont, and he was always talking about moving to Washington, where there could be a plenty of work when Congress should meet, and all the taverns and boarding-houses would be full of people; and he talked about it all the time that I lived with them at Greenmont, and at last, about six weeks ago, he started with all of us to come to the city."

"How did you travel, Nea?"

"All the way in his wagon. He did own a wagon and a pair of horses. And he packed all the bedding and some other furniture in the wagon, and we all started together—Mrs. Roach and the two smallest children rode in the wagon, Mr. Roach walked by the side of the horses, and Tom and Rache and myself walked most of the way."

"It must have tried you almost to death."

"Oh, no, it didn't! We children enjoyed it ever so much. The weather was clear all the time, and we came so slowly, because Mrs. Rocah, poor thing, couldn't bear jolting, it made her as nervous as an oyster. *Now* what are you laughing at, Diva?"

"Nothing, love! Go on! You were saying that you enjoyed the journey."

"Oh, yes! that we did! There were loads and loads of walnuts and hickorynuts and hazelnuts and chestnuts, and chincapins growing all along the road, and nobody to pick them, it seems! And we children almost lived on them, and we filled our pockets and tied up as many in handkerchiefs as we could carry, and we might have brought bushels of them in the wagon, only they rattled so when the wagon moved that Mrs. Roach, poor soul, couldn't stand the racket, it made her as nervous as an oys—Diva! if you laugh at me so, I can't go on!"

"I am not laughing at you *now,* Nea, dear; I am as quiet as—an oyster. Pray proceed. What else did you find to enjoy on the road!"

"Oh! everything? Such crowds of persimmons. The frost had touched them, and they were just as delicious as dates and tasted like them. And they went so well with the nuts. The nuts would have been too dry to live on altogether; but with the luscious persimmons, they just made a feast fit for a king."

"How long were you on your journey?"

"Eleven days. We started on a Tuesday and traveled until Sunday, when we stopped at Frostburg to go to church, and on Monday we started again and traveled slowly until we reached this city."

"Where did you sleep and eat on the journey?"

"Oh, we always slept at the first farm house that would accommodate us when it grew toward night, and we got provisions from the farmers to last us all day while we were traveling. Sometimes Mr. Roach paid for our lodging and provisions, but most of the time the country people wouldn't take a cent off him. That was the way we traveled, and it was very pleasant. We got

here on Friday. Mr. Roach got poor Mrs. Roach board in a cheap house in the Twenty Buildings, and we children lived in the wagon for a day until he rented that corner house where you found me, and then we went to work with Mr. Roach and moved all the furniture in and fixed everything up nicely, and even got the fire lighted and the table set and the tea ready before he went to bring Mrs. Roach home, because she, poor soul, couldn't stand the bustle of moving in; it made her nervous as an oy—— Diva! I won't tell you, you look so quizzical!"

"Go on, my dear, and I will be as calm as a clam! I hope the dear woman was gratified by your efforts to please her."

"No, she was *tried.* And Mr. Roach had to go out and get some compound spirits of lavender before she could be quiet."

"Ah! I should like to know what tried the dear saint on that occasion."

"Well, she said the house felt damp and smelt musty, and she was sure she never could sleep in a strange house the first night anyhow, for it always made her as nervous as——" Nea stopped shortly, and looked into the face of her companion, but seeing that face impassibly grave, concluded her sentence—"an oyster."

"How long have you been here, Nea, dear?"

"More than three weeks—almost a month."

"You have been here all this time, in the city where you were brought up, and you have never attempted to let any of your friends know of your condition! How was that, Nea!"

"Oh, Diva!" exclaimed the child, as the tears started to her eyes for the first time, "what friends have I got left? Hy dear mother in Heaven! Lance away at sea!

Even the old servants off in the lower part of the country."

"But I was here, Nea; I was still at the asylum where you left me when you were taken away!"

"But it was so long ago! And you change about so often. I did not know that you were at the asylum. Indeed I did not think it at all likely that you were."

"Child, you might have inquired!"

"I had nobody to inquire of, Diva. All these people here are strangers to me. And I was afraid to leave the neighborhood for fear of being taken up as a runaway; for, Diva, I thought Cousin Neil, being my step-father, was my *lawful* guardian and had the *lawful* right at least to do the cruel thing he did to me, in binding me out."

"Poor little soul! How long did you intend to bear your bondage?"

"I did not know, Diva. I prayed for deliverance every day, and I believed that it would come some day —as it has, you see. I always hoped that somebody would come by and see me, and know me, and get me away somehow. And now *you* have come, Diva. And now, Diva, dear, I have answered all *your* questions while I have been *aching* to ask you some."

"Ask them, my darling."

"When did you hear from Lance? My dear, dearest Lance! Where is he now? And when is he coming home?"

Eldiva looked at the eager, panting, expectant face of the child, and felt that she must answer cautiously.

"The last news we had from Lance was very good news. He was quite well, and full of affectionate solicitude for the friends he had left behind him."

"When was that? Where was he then? When is he coming home?" anxiously, breathlessly inquired Nea.

"It was a very few days ago. You know he went to the China seas for a three years' cruise."

"Yes, and he has been gone three years and five weeks. Oh, I know to a *day* how long my dear Lance has been gone. And it is time for him to be home now, and *over* time. He is *overdue,* as they say of the delayed mail packets. *When* is Lance coming home?"

"We may expect him very soon. He said he hoped to be in Washington soon after Christmas. And you know, Nea, he may come even before."

"So soon! Oh, so soon! Shall I see my dear, dear Lance so soon? Oh, Diva, I feel as if I had come out of Purgatory and was on my way to Paradise! I hope it is not a dream."

"Listen, Nea. This is a very real reality. You are as sure to see Lance about Christmas time as you can be of any earthly event. Nea, I did not want to startle you, my dear, else I would have told you at once what I tell you now. Lance is within fifty miles of us."

"Oh, Diva! oh, Diva!" exclaimed the child, in great excitement. "His ship has been signalled, then. It is coming in! It is coming! I shall see Lance in four or five days!"

"Yes, you shall see him in four or five days, Nea. But his ship is not coming in; it *is* in, and Lance is no farther off than Bloomfield Farm."

Nea stared as her eyes dilated with joy.

"His ship reached the Naval Yard about ten days ago, and yesterday he left Washington to spend Christmas with our relations at Bloomfield Farm."

"Oh, let me go to him there, Diva! Dear Diva, send

me down to dear Lance. Oh, do, do!" pleaded the child with panting eagerness.

"I shall do something better than that, my dear. I shall send a messenger down to bring Lance to us," replied the lady.

They had now reached Pennsylvania Avenue, which, at this late hour of the afternoon, was thronged with members of Congress on their way from the Capitol to their several boarding-houses to dinner. And so the conversation of the two young friends became more subdued as they entered upon the thronged sidewalk, and crossed over, walking north toward H Street.

CHAPTER IX

A NIGHT EXPEDITION

They soon reached the asylum.

"The children's tea is over with now, but you will take yours with Mrs. Dunn and myself. We have our private tables," said Eldiva, as she led the way into the house.

She took Nea at once up to her neat bed-chamber, told her to lay off her bonnet and cape, and brush her hair, and to wait there until she should return to take her downstairs.

Then, after hastily throwing off her own bonnet, Eldiva left the room and went downstairs to seek Mrs. Dunn.

She found the matron in their own cosy sitting-room, directing one of the elder girls how to arrange the dishes on the tea-table that stood in the middle of the floor.

"I had begun to grow uneasy, my dear, for fear that something had happened, though I could scarcely tell what," said the matron, with a smile of welcome to her young assistant.

"Something has happened, dear Mrs. Dunn. I have brought my young cousin, Nerissa Lovel, home with me," gravely replied Eldiva.

"Nerissa Lovel! Why, has she returned from Paris? This *is* a surprise. You did not expect her?" exclaimed the matron, astonished and sympathetic.

"No, I certainly did not expect her," said Eldiva, answering only the last clause of the matron's speech.

"And Mr. Neil Carnes, her good step-father? He has brought her home, of course?" pursued Mrs. Dunn.

"No, Nerissa returned to Washington under other protection."

"Oh, and does Mr. Carnes remain abroad?"

"I presume that he does; but I do not really know," replied Eldiva; and although she spoke in a very gentle tone, yet Ruth Dunn's fine sense detected in it a reticence that seemed to delicately put aside questioning, so she made no further inquiries, but only said cordially:

"I am very glad Nerissa has returned for Christmas. What a delightful Christmas present her unexpected arrival is for you!"

"Thank you, dear friend. You are always sure to sympathize in all my joys! I came now to explain my long absence and to ask you to put an extra plate and cup for Nea."

"Why, certainly. And bring her in as soon as you can. I have some fine stewed oysters for tea, and they are ready to take up now," gladly replied Mrs. Dunn.

"We will not keep you waiting a moment," said

Eldiva, as she flew out of the room, which she almost immediately re-entered, leading Nea.

Mrs. Dunn received the child with a cordial clasp of the hand and a warm kiss and placed her in the seat at the table which was nearest the cheerful wood-fire.

Nea's face was beaming with happiness.

"I see that her sight is quite restored," said Mrs. Dunn, smiling with sympathetic pleasure as she handed the girl a cup of tea.

"Oh, yes, quite," replied Eldiva.

"There are no oculists equal to those Parisian specialists, I suppose," continued Mrs. Dunn.

"I suppose not," assented Eldiva.

"How did you like Paris, my dear?" inquired the matron.

"I—don't know, ma'am," answered Nea, hesitating and glancing at Eldiva.

"Ah! of course, being restricted to your school and never going into company, you could not form any opinion! But at any rate, you are very glad to get home, I see."

"Oh, yes, indeed I am!" joyfully assented Nea, with a radiant smile.

Meantime Eldiva was reflecting that her intended forbearance toward her cousin, Neil Carnes, and silence in regard to Nerissa's wrongs, must impose on both herself and her little friend a course of tacit deception toward Mrs. Dunn and others to which she could not reconcile her conscience; so she turned to the matron and said:

"Dear friend, Nerissa has not been in Paris, or even out of her own native country, all this time——

'And thereby hangs a tale.'

which I must tell you this evening. We must spare the child the discussion of her affairs until you know all, when she may speak freely."

Mrs. Dunn looked astonished, and even distressed, but made no other reply than a glance full of motherly kindness toward Nea.

But the little girl was much too happy to share the grave thoughts of her elders.

After the social tea was over, Eldiva inquired if the gardener—who was the only man servant of the establishment—had left the premises.

"No," replied the matron, "he is still at work putting away the wood."

"Then, when he has finished his task and had his supper, I would like to have him attend me on a walk that I must take down to New Jersey Avenue."

"What! To-night!" exclaimed Mrs. Dunn.

"Yes, to-night. The business is important, and it is not yet seven o'clock."

"Well, I will let him know," replied the matron, leaving the room for that purpose.

Two of the elder orphan girls were clearing away the tea table.

"We have no other room for ourselves but this, Nea dear; but this will soon be made tidy; and I will get you a book to read while I am gone," said Eldiva, with thoughtful kindness.

"Oh, Diva, dear, let me go with you. I am not the least tired, and I am afraid to lose sight of you yet a while for fear I should hear poor Mrs. Roach's shrill voice screaming after me, and I should wake up to find my happiness all a dream and myself in the Twenty Buildings! Let me go with you, Diva, dearest."

"Very well, Nea, you shall go if you wish to do so.

Come with me first into the school-room. I have a note to write. Do you know where I am going to-night?"

"No, Diva," replied the child.

"I am going to get Dennis Butler to start for Bloomfield Farm this very night to take a letter from me to Lance Roslyn to tell him that you are here and to ask him to return to the city at once, so that he may be in time to spend Christmas with us."

"Oh, dear Diva, how good you are to me!" warmly responded Nea.

When they reached the bare schoolroom, with its whitewashed walls and wooden benches, Eldiva went to her desk and sat down and wrote the following short letter:

Fomale Protestant Orphan Asylum,
WASHINGTON, Dec. 21st, 18—

DEAREST COUSIN LANCE:—Steady now, I am going to shoot! Nea is here with me. She got home to-day, in good health and spirits, with her sight perfectly restored. Come at once and hear particulars, and spend Christmas with us. She is wild to see you. Excuse yourself to our relatives, and return with messenger. Love to all. Believe me, much more than you deserve, your loving cousin, ELDIVA.

She gave this letter to Nerissa to read, then folded, sealed and directed it, and took the child upstairs to prepare for their walk.

When they came down again, wrapped in warm shawls and wearing wadded hoods on their heads to protect them from the cold, they found old Uncle Abram, the colored gardener, encased in his thick, white flannel surtout, and with his foxskin hat in hand, waiting in the front hall to escort them.

"It is too bad to take you out to-night after your day's work is done, Uncle Abram; but I will remember you at Christmas," said Eldiva, graciously.

"Do'ne yer mention it, young missus. Do'ne make no sort o' diffunce to me. Allers ready to 'bleege de ladies, young missus. Tain' not a bit o' trouble!" replied the polite old negro man, opening his ample coat to fold it double across his breast before he unlocked the door to let the two girls out.

He then followed them, closing the door, which locked itself with a spring.

"Which way now, young missus?" he inquired, when all three had reached the sidewalk.

"To New Jersey Avenue," replied Eldiva.

And they set out at a brisk pace.

It was a cold, crisp, moonlight night, and the hoar-frost lay as white upon the ground as snow.

They rather enjoyed the walk through the exhilarating air, especially when they turned into Pennsylvania Avenue, which was then adorned with tall, spire-like Lombardy poplar trees, and lighted by whale oil lamps placed at long distances.

At this hour, also, the avenue was alive with promenaders, either enjoying a mild winter night's constitutional, or else on their way to some scene of amusement.

They walked down the avenue until they reached the Capitol grounds, and then turned to the left, for it was to the North New Jersey Avenue they were going.

"Do you know where Dennis Butler, the market gardener, lives, Uncle Abram?" inquired Eldiva, as they walked up under the north wall of the Capitol grounds.

"Hi! wot yer talking about, young missus? Does I know w'ere de corporation pump is! Course I know

w'ere Dennis lib! *Dar* w'ere he lib—in dat dar two-story blue frame house yer see up on dat hill dar, wid a dreat big garden behind it!"

"Yes, that is the place. We are going there," smiled Eldiva.

They soon reached the house, and found Dennis and his large family all at supper over a pot of hominy and a leg of pork.

"Don't let me disturb you, Dennis. Finish your supper and then I will talk to you. I will sit here till you have done," said Eldiva, to the tall and strong young colored man who had come to the door with his mouth full.

"Bress my wits, Miss Eldivy! Is dis you, young missus? Come inter de parlor! How do, Uncle Abram? You waitin' on de ladies, is yer? You'se hoped up in de ole ages ob yer pilgrimage, you is! An' who's dis little young lady? W'y, bress my wits, if it isn't Miss Nerissy! An' how she's growed! Come in, young ladies! Come inter de parlor! I has done finish my supper—I has indeed, an' is quite at yer sarvice," said Dennis, with many bows and scrapes.

They entered a narrow passage which had three doors —a back door which, standing wide open, revealed the warm kitchen with its bright wood fire and long table, at which a negro woman and half a dozen small negro children were at supper, and whence the strong aroma of boiled pork and hominy poured like a steam; a door on the left, also open, and giving a glimpse of a little bed-chamber; and a door on the right, opening into a neat, rustic parlor, into which Dennis led his visitors.

"Sit down here, young missus," he said, standing his lighted tallow candle on the mantel piece between two green and yellow plaster parrots, and then drawing a

hard-cushioned armchair, covered with bright-flowered curtain calico, up to Eldiva. "Sit down here and make yerse'f comfomable, and you, little mistis, you take dis t'other chair. And now, young missus, tell me wot Dennis can do for yer."

"Are you thinking of going down to Bloomfield Farm to see your father and mother this Christmas, Dennis?" inquired Eldiva, by way of opening negotiations.

"Well, young missus, I *was* a thinkin' 'bout goin' to see de ole people, 'cause it's moughty heavy on my mine as dey mought die 'fo' anoder Christmas an' me not see 'em again."

"Are you going, then?"

"'F'aid not, missus. Can't 'ford it.'

"Well, see here, Dennis. I have an errand down to Bloomfield Farm which is very important. I want it done immediately. So, if you will go immediately, I will pay for the hire of your horse and give you five dollars besides. Now, what do you say?"

"Glory to de Lord, Miss Eldivy! I say yes, an' thank yer, too, missus! Does yer want me to start termorrer?"

"I want you to start to-night! This is a fine moonlight night, a splendid night for travelling, and you are a fine, stalwart man who can well bear fatigue and loss of sleep. It is not yet eight o'clock. You can prepare for your journey and be off by nine. You can reach Bloomfield Farm by to-morrow noon, deliver this letter to Mr. Lance Roslyn, spend the day with your old father and mother, and the night with them also, for that matter, and the next morning, Monday, you can start on your return with Mr. Lance Roslyn, and get back here in time to keep Christmas with your family. Then, you see, you will visit your old parents without

losing your holiday at home. What do you say? Can you start to-night?"

"Miss Eldivy, ef I ain't across de Eastern Branch Bridge on my road to ole Si' Mary's afore de clock strike ten to-night, nebber you make me no good offer agin!" said Dennis, blithely.

Eldiva gave him the letter for Lance Roslyn, and two five-dollar notes to pay for the hire of his horse and for his own time and trouble, and then arose to depart.

"I hope you will have good weather and a pleasant journey, Dennis. Remember me to your father and mother," she said, as she left the room.

"*That* I will, Miss Eldivy. An' you 'pend on Dennis Butler to fetch Marse Lance back to you by Tuesday mornin' first fing! An' you, Uncle Ab'am, you take care ob dese young ladies a walkin' home to-night! Don't yer let none ob dem riff-raff rabble o' Congressors speak to 'em on de abenue! Yer ha'r wot I'm talkin' 'bout, don't yer?" he said, taking the old gardener by the hand.

"I h'ar yer, nigger, but I done fink yer knows who yer's talkin' ter right good! Tell me take care ob dese ladies? Who been takin' care ob dem all de time? Eh? Not you, shure!" retorted the old man, as he followed the two girls out of the house.

They walked briskly back up the avenue which now, at half-past eight o'clock, was livelier than ever.

"How good you are to me, Eldiva, spending so much money for me," said Nerissa.

"That money was given me by Lance to spend for you, Nea, and I am sure I could not spend it in a way that would be more satisfactory to both of you than I have done," said Eldiva, gravely.

Nea pulled on the hand of her friend and stopped her in the moonlight to stare in her face.

"Lance gave you that money to spend for me!" she exclaimed in astonishment.

"Yes, he did. And Lance sent me to see you," replied Eldiva, amused at the amazement and perplexity of the girl.

"Lance sent you to see me!" she cried, with open mouth and suspended breath.

"Yes, he did. It was the last charge he gave me the night before he went away."

"Oh, then, if he knew that I was in the city, *why* did he go at all? Why did he not come to see me himself?" inquired Nea, in an aggrieved tone.

"He did not know that you were in the city. He thought, as we all did, that you were in Paris. Come, Nea, dear, I see that you are puzzled. Now, I will read the riddle to you. Ten days ago, when Lance first arrived, he was on his way to see General North, at Greenleaf's Point, when he passed the Twenty Buildings and saw you at the pump—in your working clothes, you understand. He did not recognize you, my dear. How should he? He thought you were three thousand miles away; he had not seen you for three years; he certainly did not expect to see you then and there; you had grown very much, and changed very much; but still there was something in the tall, sallow, bare-footed girl at the pump that reminded him of the dainty little lady whom he supposed to be receiving her education in a first-class French school; and he pitied you so much that he would have approached and spoken to you, had not a sharp, angry voice from the house called you harshly in-doors."

"And oh! if he *had* come and spoken to me, I should have recognized him by his voice and his manner, and

made myself known to him? And then he would have brought me away at once; he would have stayed with me, and not gone down into Maryland!" complained Nea.

"You noticed him, then, dear?" inquired Eldiva.

"'Noticed him!' Yes, indeed I did! I looked at the young man in uniform, and I *felt* the presence of my dear Lance, without knowing what it was that shook me so! and if he had come nearer and spoken, I should have known him by his tone and manner. But, you see, Eldiva, *I could not* know him by sight, because you must remember that I had never seen his face, except as a white mist at the top of a shadowy figure, since I was a baby. I did not recognize even *you,* Diva, though you were face to face with me, until you spoke."

"I remember," replied the lady.

"How came Lance to give you the money to spend for me and to send you to see me if he did not recognize me!" inquired the child.

"Because you reminded him of his own little Nea, and so excited his sympathies, and he wished to do you good. He sent me instead of going himself, because he thought it was more delicate and proper that a lady should go on such an errand than that a gentleman should.

"Oh, my dear Lance! My dearest, best Lance!" muttered the child.

Walking rapidly through the crisp night air, they reached the asylum about ten o'clock.

All the children had long before retired to rest, but Mrs. Dunn was waiting up for them.

She welcomed them warmly, but as it was late, they kissed her good-night and went upstairs to Eldiva's

room and went to bed—where, being very tired from walking, they soon fell asleep.

The next day, being Sunday, all went to church as usual, both in the morning and in the afternoon.

Monday was a busy day in the asylum for they were all preparing for Christmas.

And it was an especially busy day for Eldiva and Nerissa, for in those days there were no ladies' ready-made clothing bazaars, and there were no sewing machines. All ladies' garments had to be made at home, or at a dressmaker's, and by the slow process of the hand alone; so that it was rather a serious matter when a young lady without any sort of a wardrobe, except a very objectionable suit of clothing, dropped down upon a household as Nea had done.

Eldiva after some rapid reflection, concluded that the shortest way to go to work would be to alter some of her own dresses for Nea's use.

Eldiva had worn nothing but black and white for four years past; and all her colored wardrobe, including her rich wedding trousseau, had been packed away in cedar chests during all that time.

Be it remembered that this young lady was a very minute little beauty, and at the time of her marriage, nearly five years previous, she had been as slender as Nea now.

So she took the child to her room on that Monday morning, and dismantled a large cedar chest that, draped with white dimity, surmounted by a looking-glass, and adorned with toilet boxes and scent bottles, was doing duty as a dressing-table; unlocked it, and displayed its treasures of silks, satins, cashmeres, and velvet.

She found that the dresses very nearly fit Nea, and

needed but very little taking in at the waist and shortening in the skirt.

"There, you may have them all, Nea; and I am very glad that they have come into use, for I shall never wear anything but black so long as I live," said the lady, as she shook the rich dresses from their folds and laid them on the bed and over the chairs.

"O! dear Diva, I am so delighted and thankful! They are all *so* beautiful—too beautiful for me to wear now! And oh! Diva, dear, don't say that you will never wear anything but black—don't! When Mr. John Daw comes back——"

"Nea, my darling!"

Surprised and somewhat alarmed at the solemn tone of her cousin, the child started and stared at the lady.

"Never mention that name to me again if you love me!"

"I will not, then, Diva, for I love you dearly."

"Very well, then, darling, it is all right; and now let us look over these dresses. One of them must be altered for you to wear at Christmas, and another for other days. This must be done at once. Now choose two, my dear," quietly replied the lady.

Nea was a very young girl, still a child, in many respects, and she was expecting a visit from her lover; was it any wonder, then, that she became instantly and intensely interested in the question of dresses?

She looked fondly over the riches displayed before her, and then said:

"I think, Diva, I would like to have this crimson silk for a best dress, and this dark blue cashmere for a common one."

"Very well, my dear. I quite approve your choice. We will fix the crimson silk first, as you will need it for

Christmas. Now help me to fold up all the other dresses and put them back in the chest. They are all yours, my Nea, remember that."

"Oh, Diva, dear, you are so good to me. I wish I could do something for you," said the child, stealing her arms around the lady's neck and kissing her fondly.

"You can *love* me, Nea, and you *do;* that is enough," said Eldiva, returning the caress.

"Oh, but if I could *give* you anything!"

"You can give me love, Nea; the most precious gift of all, and you do give it."

"It is all I have to give," said the child, with a little sigh.

They put the clothes back into the cedar chest, closed, locked and draped it so that it became a dressing-table again, with white dimity cover and valance, gilt-framed looking-glass, shell toilet boxes, and porcelain scent bottles.

Then the two girls sat down and went to work to alter the crimson silk. They both sewed all day, and finished not only that, but also the blue cashmere.

Tuesday morning came bright and frosty.

Nea was very much exhilarated.

"Lance will be here before night, if he started yesterday. He may even arrive by noon, if he rides fast. And I *think* he will ride fast," she added.

After breakfast was over she dressed herself in her crimson silk, to do honor to the "distinguished arrival."

And very beautiful she looked with her slender, graceful figure, and her small shapely head, with its dark-brown, curling hair shading the delicate features of her clear, pale face, and her dark, tender, brown eyes. She had just finished her toilet by putting on a little India muslin fischu, which she crossed over her bosom and

tied behind her back, and she had placed a white rose in its front folds, when a pleasant hubbub downstairs was followed by the sudden entrance of one of the elder orphans, who dashed into the room in a fit of sympathetic excitement, exclaiming:

"The capting have arrove, Miss! And Mrs. Daws say will you come to see him."

CHAPTER X

LANCELOT AND NERISSA

Nerissa flew out of the room and down the stairs. She was to see Lancelot—to see Lancelot whom she had not seen for more than three years. To see him face to face, *clearly,* as she never remembered to have seen him before. For in her blind infancy and childhood she had seen him only through a mist, in which his form appeared as a thick shadow, and his face as a dim cloud.

And how changed he must be. He must be much taller and stouter, as well as clearer to her vision now.

All these fancies sped like flashes of light through her mind as she flew on to meet him.

She was stopped in the lower hall by Eldiva who took her hand and whispered:

"Say nothing to Lance to-day about Neil Carnes' villainy or your own wrongs, dear Nea——"

"Oh, no, no, no! I will not pain him so," eagerly interrupted the girl.

"But let your meeting be one of happiness, unalloyed by grief or anger," continued the lady.

"Oh, yes, yes; it shall be so! It must be so!" vehemently exclaimed the girl.

"Of course it must be told; but let it be after dinner, so that he may enjoy the morning——"

"Yes, yes!" impatiently exclaimed Nerissa. "Oh, let me go to Lance, dear Lance."

"But he must be told some time to-day, so that he may get over it before to-morrow, which is Christmas, you know."

"Yes, yes," cried Nea, impetuously, as she broke away and ran into the parlor, where she suddenly stopped in the middle of the floor astonished.

Was that her own Lance? That broad-shouldered, sun-burned, and dark-whiskered young man in the naval uniform? Her Lance, her own dear old Lance-boy.

It seemed impossible.

But in an instant her doubts—if she really had any—were dispersed by the young gentleman, who, in two swift steps met her and clasped her to his heart, murmuring, in deep emotion:

"Nea, dear Nea, dear little sister!" His voice broke down, and he held her in silence to his bosom for a few moments and then led her to the sofa, where they sat down side by side.

There he put her off a little way from him that he might gaze at her, saying:

"How much you have changed and improved, little one! And oh, how beautiful you are! There, I did not mean to say that at all; it broke from me unawares," he added, with a laugh; and though his lips did not repeat the words, yet his eyes, gazing with respectful tenderness on the young girl, continued to say: "You *are* beautiful, very beautiful, Nerissa Lovel!"

"Oh, Lance," she cried, trembling with joy, "I am so glad to see you! So very, very glad!"

"Oh, Lance, I am so happy, I am afraid I shall die, or something dreadful will take place! It is not natural for people in this world to be so happy, Lance, as happy as if they were in Heaven!" she said, after a silence of a few minutes.

"Dear little Nea! Darling little Nea! Not so little now, however. But *always* nearest and dearest. Do you remember those words, Nea?"

"Oh, yes, indeed I have treasured them up. I have treasured them up. And, oh, Lance, I do think I remember every *serious* word you ever said to me in your life," replied the girl, with earnest, beaming face.

"Do you, love? And we have been parted more than three years. But you have recovered your sight. Have you perfectly recovered it, Nea?" solicitously inquired the young man.

"Oh, perfectly, dear Lance. And it is such a happiness to be able to see you!"

"Those French oculists are the most scientific and successful in the whole world; I believe that is generally conceded to them. How good it was in Neil Carnes to take you there, Nea. But he did not bring you home, Diva tells me."

"No," said Nea, evasively, and blushing at the evasion.

"I came to Washington under the protection of a family named Roach."

"Ah! had you a pleasant sea voyage?"

"I had a very pleasant journey all the way," answered Nea.

Lance did not notice the substituted word; but immediately inquired:

"Where is Mr. Neil Carnes now?"

"He is abroad, but I do not know where. He was going to the mountainous regions when he left me with the Roaches."

"Ah! Well, Nea, tell me how you liked Paris."

This question took the girl by surprise. She was unprepared to answer it; but as Lance was waiting for a reply, she at length said, hesitatingly:

"I like home better than any place in the world."

"Home?" Ah, poor girl! in Lance's presence she had forgotten that she had no "home;" but it is true that it is always

'Home where'er the heart is,'

and Nea's heart was with her own Lance.

"You are a loyal little soul, Nerissa, and I do believe that all the splendors of Europe could not lure your love from us," said Lance, earnestly.

"Of course, nothing could. And Lance I will tell all about my travels to-morrow, or this afternoon, I mean; but now I want to hear something about *you.* Oh, you have been gone so far—quite around the world!"

"Yes, dear Nea; and I have seen many strange places and many curious races. And I have brought back momentoes of my voyages. I have a monkey and a parrot for you, Nea. I left them in the care of an old sailor, at the Navy Yard. I have also some China vases and ivory fans, and Canton crapes for you, Nea! They are in my sea-chest on board the *Porpoise,* my dear."

"Oh, Lance, how good you are to me! How good! Oh, I shall take such delight in the monkey and the parrot! And in the pretty vases and fans, and all! Tell me, do you *like* a sailor's life, dear Lance? Are you happy when you are on the sea? Tell me all about it!"

"Yes, dear, I like a sailor's life; and if it were not for the separation from all my dear ones, I should be perfectly happy at sea!"

"Tell me about it, Lance!"

The young midshipman smiled, complied, telling her of his long cruise and of the many East Indian ports he had seen, and of the China Sea and the city of Canton, and so forth and so forth.

Lancelot Roslyn, like all travelers, liked to tell of his voyages, and he had in Nerissa an attentive and interested listener.

They talked only on this subject until dinner time.

But the *one* thought that lay deepest in the hearts of the youth and maiden, was not uttered by either. This was the memory of Zora Roslyn. Strangely enough, each forbore to allude to her departure from this life, for fear of paining the other, at this their first meeting, after so long an absence.

When the dinner bell rang, for the private table of the matron and the teacher, it was Nerissa who arose with a smile and offered her hand to Lancelot, saying, humorously:

"We must reverse the order of etiquette a little, and it is *I* who must lead *you* into the dining-room, Mr. Roslyn!"

"I fancy it will be unnecessary, for I can find the way," laughed Lance, drawing her hand through his arm and marching off to join the two ladies at the table.

Two hours later in the afternoon Eldiva, Lancelot, and Nerissa were gathered around the open wood fire in the parlor.

Eldiva had been trying to summon courage to tell Lance of Neil Carnes's treachery and of Nea's wrongs;

but as yet she had not succeeded, when Lance himself led up to the subject by suddenly inquiring:

"Well, Diva, what about the little girl in the Twenty Buildings? Did you succeed in finding her?"

"Oh, yes, I found her without any difficulty, and thanks to you who sent me to her, all her wants are provided for," replied Diva, while Nea dropped her eyelids and blushed up to the edges of her dark hair, for however unmerited her misfortunes might have been, it was very humiliating to her to think of them in the presence of the young midshipman.

Now Eldiva might have produced a highly dramatic effect, when she had told Lance that the wants of the poor girl of the Twenty Buildings had been provided for, by adding:

"There she sits," and pointing to Nerissa.

But Eldiva could not do this; she wished rather to avoid shocking the young midshipman, and to tell the story of Nea's bondage from the beginning, so that the climax might be gradually reached.

"Was the little one pleased with what you did for her?" inquired Lance.

"Very much pleased, indeed, and very grateful; but, Lancelot dear, I will tell you all about *her* by and by; now I wish to speak of Nea, and tell you her little story from the time she bade me good-by in this very parlor, nearly three years ago, to be taken by her cousin and step-father, Neil Carnes, to Paris."

"Yes, certainly I wish to hear that; but why cannot Nea tell me?" inquired the young man, smiling on his little friend.

"She can, if she pleases, of course," replied Eldiva.

"Oh, no, indeed, I cannot, Lance! Indeed I cannot,

Diva! Oh, Lance, let Diva tell it, since it *must* be told!" impetuously exclaimed Nea.

"Very well, Nea. Go on, Diva dear; but remember that I already know very much of Nerissa's Paris life from *her* letters and those of Neil Carnes, of which you placed a large packet in my hands for perusal. I have read every one of those letters, Diva," laughed Lance.

"Very well. I shall not bore you with the repetition of any facts that you have learned in those letters. I will, however, 'begin at the beginning,' as the proverb runs," said Eldiva.

And, while Lancelot listened attentively and Nerissa dropped her head upon her bosom and fixed her eyes upon her folded hands in her lap in a humiliation the most pathetic, because she was not in any manner responsible for her own wrongs—Eldiva began the story of Neil Carnes' villainy and Nerissa Lovel's sufferings.

It was curious to observe Lancelot's growing interest and rising excitement as the narrative progressed and the treachery of the false guardian appeared. Lancelot's eyes flashed, his teeth ground, his fist clenched.

At length he sprang up and began to walk rapidly up and down the floor, his breast heaving, his breath coming in short gasps.

"The scoundrel! The scoundrel! The atrocious villain!" he muttered, grinding his teeth.

"Oh, that I had him here. What could have been his motive?" he suddenly demanded, turning upon Eldiva.

"No one on earth can tell at present. That there *was* a motive, and a very powerful motive, is certain. But what it was remains yet to be discovered," answered the lady.

"And to think that the girl I saw in such poverty at the Twenty Buildings was our dainty Nea! Oh, oh, to

think of that! Nea, love—Nea darling—don't look so distressed! It was your misfortune, not your fault. Your misfortune, for which I love you even more tenderly than ever before. Oh, my nearest and dearest!" said Lance, sitting down by the young girl and taking her head upon his breast.

"And now you have the whole truth, Lance," concluded Eldiva, when she had described her visit to the Twenty Buildings and her recognition and rescue of Nerissa.

"No, not the whole truth yet. But only so much of the truth as has come to your knowledge. We have not got the motive of that fiend Carnes yet. And, until we get his motive we will hardly know how to proceed. Why did he wish to put Nerissa out of the way where none of her friends would be ever likely to find her? And but for the accident of the Roaches moving from the Alleghanies to Washington, no one ever would have found her! Now, what could have been his motive? Have you no ideas on the subject, Diva?"

"None whatever, I assure you. I have puzzled over the question until my brains are nearly addled," replied Eldiva.

"Nor you, Nea, dear?"

The girl shook her head.

"Then I shall go and see the Roaches," said the young man, grimly. "I may get a clew from them to this man's thought."

"Dear Lance, don't do so. They can tell you nothing, I am sure. They know even less than we do," pleaded Nea.

"It could not have been just to get rid of the expense of keeping you, dear, for he knew very well that Aunt

and Uncle Wells would have received you with pleasure, or even Eldiva here."

"Yes, he knew that. Diva begged for me, and was only reconciled to my leaving her by the belief that I was going for my good," admitted Nea.

"I must go and question the Roaches," persisted Lance.

"Oh, don't, don't, don't!" pleaded Nea. "They know nothing—indeed they do not! And poor Mrs. Roach is so sickly it would frighten her nearly to death! Why, she is just as nervous as an oys—I mean she is just as nervous as she can be!" said Nea, correcting herself, and giving a quick glance at Eldiva.

Lance said no more, but privately kept to his resolution.

"Now, my dear Lancelot!" said Eldiva, gravely, "to-morrow is Christmas Day, when we celebrate the birth of the Prince of Peace—the day whose motto is, 'Peace and good will to men.' Therefore, Lance, 'Cease from anger, and forsake wrath; fret not thyself to do evil.' Come, dear; we have much pleasanter work in hand. You remember you made me your almoner."

"Yes, Diva," replied the young man, with a tumultuous sigh, as the waves of his emotion subsided under her pacific hand.

"Well, you see one result," said Eldiva, with a fond glance toward Nerissa.

"Yes," said Lance with a smile; for he was under the pleasing impression that his ten-dollar bill had purchased the rich crimson silk dress that so well became the brunette beauty of Nerissa, but which really cost about ten times as much.

"I see that you are satisfied with that part of my mission," said Eldiva.

"Oh!" exclaimed Lance, in warm assent.

"Now for the other part. You remember that your gift to the asylum was to be invested in Christmas toys for the children—dolls and ribbons, as a matter of detail?"

"Yes."

"Well, I suppose you take but little interest in dolls or ribbons for their own sake, but as they are your gift, and as I have already lost a good deal of time in your cause, I must enlist your services to help me and Nerissa to label these presents for their prospective owners."

"Oh! of course, I will gladly do so. Parade the ladies and the streamers at once," laughed Lance.

"No; you have only got to write the labels. Nerissa and I will fix them on. Wait a moment," said Eldiva, as she hurried out of the room.

She soon returned, bringing a large, square book and a half quire of letter paper under one arm, and an inkstand, a pair of shears, and a bunch of quill pens in her hands.

These she placed on the table, and opening the book, said:

"Here is a list of the pupils. Copy their names on this letter paper so as to cut them in slips. This is your task."

Lance, pleased to be of use, drew a chair to the table and commenced work.

Then Eldiva went upstairs and brought down a large pasteboard box, full of dolls and rolls of ribbon, with a tape-measure.

"Now, Nerissa, dear, sit here with me and measure off and cut this ribbon into two-yard slips, and roll them neatly, and fasten them with a pin," said Eldiva, as she

drew a side-table up between her own chair and that of Nea, and laid the box upon it.

The two girls then sat down and began work, Eldiva tacking the labels on the dolls as Lance handed them over to her, and Nerissa dividing and rolling the ribbons, which were also to be labeled in their turn.

The work was really play that inspired frequent jests and laughter, so that the afternoon passed merrily.

It was all finished and arranged in the box some little time before Mrs. Dunn's tea-bell rang. Then once more they went in together to the neat table presided over by the smiling matron.

Soon after tea Lancelot bade his friends good-night with a promise to return immediately after breakfast to assist in the distribution of his presents.

When he had gone, Ruth Dunn came into the parlor and sat down with Eldiva and Nerissa, saying:

"I would not interrupt you before, but now I have come to tell you of the loads of Christmas cheer sent in by the ladies; not only by the lady managers, but by other ladies—turkeys, mince pies, pound cake, boxes of figs and raisins, kegs of almonds and water crackers, more, indeed, than we can use in two months. The children will feast. Don't you smell the turkeys! I have four of them roasting now for to-morrow—two in each oven. And on the day after to-morrow I shall have all the rest roasted, if it takes all day, for they will not keep else. Why, do you know there are sixteen turkeys! More than we ever had given us at any former Christmas."

"I am so glad for the poor children's sake," said Eldiva.

Nerissa was looking on so eagerly that her dilated brown eyes shone like stars.

"What is it, Nea? You look really *hungry* for something or other; what is it, my dear?" smiled Eldiva.

"It is for one of those turkeys! You have so many turkeys! And oh! I wish, I wish, I *wish* I had one to give to the poor Roaches!" vehemently exclaimed the girl.

"But, my dear, these were given to the asylum, and we have no right to give one of them away," Eldiva explained.

"Oh! but I WISH I had one for them! Poor Mr. Roach, who has no work, and poor Mrs. Roach, who is so sickly, and poor Tommy and Rachel and the little ones! They will have no Christmas at all, Diva! I know they won't!"

"The woman doesn't deserve any," was Eldiva's thought; but she only said:

"The children shall have some Christmas. It is late but not too late. I will send for a hack and you and I will take a big basket and drive down to the Marsh Market and buy a turkey and some cakes and fruit and take them to the family—what do you say?"

"Oh, Diva! I wish you would! I wish you would!" exclaimed Nea.

The gardener was summoned and sent for a hack.

Eldiva took Nea upstairs, that they might put on their bonnets and shawls.

When they came out of their chamber they were met by Mrs. Dunn, who said:

"I want you to come into the clothesroom and look at the orphans' new winter Sunday suits that they are to wear for the first time to-morrow. They have just been sent in."

The two girls followed the matron into a large wardrobe room, with shelves and hooks all around the walls,

and where half a dozen of the elder orphans were engaged in unpacking large boxes and hanging up frocks and capes and hoods. These were all of dark blue serge, and the capes and hoods were thickly wadded and quilted.

Eldiva and Nea duly admired the uniform and then went downstairs, and found the hack at the door.

They entered it, taking a large basket with them, and ordered the coachman to drive to the Marsh Market.

The road lay down H Street, and down Seventh Street to Pennsylvania Avenue

The avenue was gay with preparations for Christmas.

They crossed it and drew up at the market on the south side.

When they got out of the hack they were confronted by the old gardener, who had just come down from his seat beside the driver.

"Why!—I didn't know that *you* had come along, Uncle Ambrose!" exclaimed Eldiva.

"Well, I has, den, honey! You dem didn't tink as I was gwine to 'low you young ladies to drive about at night in a strange hack wid so many Congressmongers runnin' 'roung loose, did yer?" demanded the old man.

"Well! I am very glad you have come with us, although I should not have asked you to take the trouble," replied Eldiva.

"'Deed, raly, I dunno wot you'd a done widout me, den! Gimmy dat basket, honey."

CHAPTER XI

CHRISTMAS

Eldiva handed out the basket and then gave her arm to Nerissa, and they walked into the market, followed and guarded by Old Ambrose.

The market was a "gay and festive" scene on that Christmas Eve night.

It was not lighted by gas, as now. In fact, it was not the handsome and substantial stone and brick building that it appears now under the name of the Centre Market.

It was but a long double wooden roof supported by posts, and having only in places a floor beneath; it was furnished with rows of rude stalls and heavy blocks, and it was lighted only by whale-oil lamps and tallow candles. In a word, it was not the fine Centre Market of to-day, but the old Marsh Market, or as the people called it, the "Mash" Market, of many years ago.

But it was as bountifully filled with meats, fish, poultry, game, vegetables, fruits, nuts, cakes, and everything else eatable and drinkable, and it was as well crowded with sellers and buyers, as the finest market in the finest city in the world.

Let any of my readers figure the gayest market they ever saw on a Christmas Eve and save me the trouble of describing this one.

Eldiva went to the poultry stalls, which were all in a row on the outside of the sheds, with flaring tallow candles in brackets over them.

She let Nea choose the turkey, and the inexperienced girl picked out the largest, fattest, and heaviest of the

lot, in blissful ignorance that it was a venerable old gobbler. *That* discovery was reserved for the Roaches the next day.

The turkey was paid for and put in the basket, and then Nea, who, in her benevolence, had no more consideration for Eldiva's pocket than she would have had for her own, if there had been any money in it, looked pleadingly in the face of her companion and whispered:

"*Poor* Mrs. Roach is *very fond* of pork and cabbage."

"'*Very fond*' of pork and cabbage! Oh, my dear Nea! how your language wants refining," thought Eldiva; but she did not express her thought; she good-naturedly inquired:

"Well! would you like to get some for her?"

"Oh, yes, dear Diva," eagerly replied the child.

The pork and cabbage were bought in addition to the turkey, the cakes, fruit, butter, and so forth.

When the basket was full, in passing out of the market they came upon a stall full of toys.

Nerissa did not say a word, but she heaved an eloquent sigh.

Eldiva understood her and said:

"You want me to buy some toys for those children?"

"Oh, yes, Diva! Yes!" exclaimed the girl.

"Well, select something for each one."

Nea, trembling with delight, got an accordeon for Tommy, a work-box for Rachel, and two dolls for the little children.

Eldiva paid for these, and looked with dismay at her nearly empty purse.

Then they re-entered the hack.

Old Ambrose took the basket up on the box between himself and the coachman, and the hack started.

Half an hour's rapid driving brought them to the

Twenty Buildings and to the corner house occupied by the Roaches.

There the hack drew up.

Everything was dark about the front of the house.

"They are all in the kitchen. There is where they stay almost always," said Nea.

"Now this is *your* affair, my dear Nerissa, and I want you to have everything your own way. Shall we get out and go in?"

"Oh, no, Diva! It would make poor Mrs. Roach as nervous as an oyster to see us. Let Uncle Ambrose knock at the door and hand the basket in and say it was sent by a friend," replied the girl.

"Very well," said the lady.

In the meantime Old Ambrose had lifted the heavy basket down from the box and brought it around to the carriage door.

"Take it to that house, Uncle Ambrose; knock and say to whoever comes that it was sent by a friend," said Eldiva.

"All right, young mistess."

"Wait a minute, Uncle Ambrose," exclaimed Nerissa. "Please you say that the accordeon is for Tommy, and the work-box for Rachel, and the two dolls for the two little ones."

"Jess so, young mistess."

The old man took up the basket and went to the house and knocked loudly.

The door was soon opened by a boy.

"It is Tommy," said Nea; and she bent forward to listen whether Old Ambrose would deliver his message aright.

This is what she heard:

"These here fings is sent to de fambly, wid de compli-

mence ob a frien'—a well-wishing frien'. An' de concordiance which is dis musical bellows-machine, is for Mr. Tommy."

"Oh! that's me!" exclaimed the boy, seizing the accordeon from the hand of the old man.

"Don't yer be so fresh, young youth!" remonstrated Uncle Ambrose—then he continued: "Dis work-box is for—for—wot's her name ag'in?—de young gal wot's big 'nough to use it, I s'pose!"

"Rachel?" suggested the boy.

"Yes! dat's it—Rachel! Dis box is for Rachel. And de dolls is fur de little chilun. Dere! An' de rest ob de truck is fur de fambly in ginral. Dere, take um all in, and good-night!" said Old Ambrose, unceremoniously emptying the contents of the basket on the passage floor.

"But who sent them all?"

"Frien's—well-wishin' frien's! Yer ain't got no call to ax no more'n dat. *We-dem* don't go 'roun' blowin' of a trump afore us w'en we does our arms. Dere! Shet de do', boy, and take up de truck," said Uncle Ambrose, as he picked up the basket and returned to the hack.

"Jess so, young mistesses. It's all right!" he said, as he mounted to his seat beside the coachman.

The hack started again, and in another half hour they reached the asylum.

"Half-past nine! We have got through sooner than I expected," said Eldiva, as she looked at her watch after she had paid and discharged the hack and found herself and Nerissa once more in the parlor of the asylum.

"You don't know how good I think you, Diva! You don't know how I love you and thank you!" said Nerissa, putting her arms around the lady's neck and kissing her fondly.

Eldiva warmly but silently returned the caress.

"What can I do for you, Diva, dear? What can *I* do for *you?*" anxiously inquired the girl.

"If we go to bed *now,* before ten o'clock, do you think you can get up by daybreak to-morrow morning and go with me on a pious pilgrimage, so that we may get back in time for the children's breakfast and the distribution of presents which will follow immediately after breakfast?"

"Oh, yes, Diva! yes! Of course I can! Where are we going?"

"To the cemetery to lay wreaths of immortelles, our Christmas offerings on the shrines of our departed and beloved ones. We must remember them also at this season, dear Nerissa."

"Oh, yes, indeed we must. I will go with you so willingly, Diva. And they, in heaven, will know it, will they not?"

"They will surely know our love, and our act will reach them in some spiritual and more beautiful way than it will appear here," said the lady, reverently, as she took up the lamp that had been left lighted for her and led the way upstairs.

They went to bed and slept soundly until they were awakened by the Christmas bells.

It was not yet daylight, but they had had about eight hours' perfect sleep, and so they arose quite refreshed to greet the new Christmas Day.

Eldiva struck a light and lighted the lamp, by which they dressed themselves quickly. They wrapped up warmly, and when they were quite ready to start, Eldiva took from a closet a round bandbox which contained the wreaths of immortelles with which she had previously provided herself, and they went downstairs

and out to the sidewalk, where they found the carriage that they had used on the evening previous and that Eldiva had engaged to come for them at this early hour, standing at the door.

Eldiva gave the order:

"To the Congress Burying Ground," and got in the hack, followed by Nerissa.

It was still dark, yet the Christmas bells were ringing in all the Catholic churches throughout the city.

Forty minutes' drive took them to the gate of the cemetery, just as the first red streaks on the eastern horizon heralded the coming of the sun.

The gates were not yet open, but Eldiva alighted and rapped at the door of the keeper's house, which fronted on the lane.

After some little delay the humpback appeared in answer to her summons.

"Good morning, Mr. Dee. A happy Christmas to you! I know it is too early to open the gates, but—I had not time yesterday to bring my wreaths, as I usually do on Christmas Eve, so I had to come this morning. And if you will let me enter through your house to lay these offerings on our shrines I shall thank you very much," said Eldiva.

"Certainly, ma'am. Walk in," replied the hunchback, opening wide the door.

Eldiva entered, followed by Nerissa, and passing through the house, came out by the back door into the cemetery.

They went to the grave of Zora, which was marked by an obelisk of white marble bearing her name as "the beloved wife of Neil Carnes," and the date of her birth and death.

Eldiva gave the weeping daughter two wreaths, which

Nerissa placed, with reverent care, the one at the head, the other at the foot of the grave.

At that moment the rising sun gilded the apex of the obelisk and lighted up all the scene.

"See!" said Eldiva, laying her hand on the bowed head of the girl, "Weep no more! Look up! Behold this 'outward and visible sign' of the resurrection—of the life immortal!"

Nerissa raised her eyes, suffused with tears, wiped them, smiled, and answered:

"Do not mind me, dear Diva! My heart does not ache, although I am crying. Sometimes one cries only from love and tenderness, not from sorrow. I know my dear, beautiful mother is happy in heaven! I know that in some lovely way she receives this offering. I even feel it *here,* Diva," added the girl, pressing her hand upon her heart. "And I will not drop another tear on this blessed Christmas Day!"

Eldiva took her hand and lifted her from the ground, and they walked on to that southeastern knoll on which was railed in the lot containing the two graves of the late keeper of the cemetery and of his father.

Eldiva laid one wreath upon the first-named grave, and then kneeling by the second grave, she laid on it two wreaths, the one at the head and the other at the foot, and bowing her head, she remained a few minutes in silent prayer.

Finally she arose slowly and gave her hand to Nerissa, and they walked away together.

Not until they were seated side by side in the carriage, rolling on toward the asylum, did either speak to the other.

Then Nerissa inquired in a low and deferential tone:

"Why do you lay wreaths on those two graves, Diva?

What were these strange men to us? The old keeper and his son?"

"Dear Nerissa, some day, if we both live, I will tell you. I cannot now. Let the subject drop, darling," replied Eldiva.

They drove rapidly back to the asylum, where they arrived just as the children, all dressed in their new clothes, were forming in rank to march into breakfast.

Eldiva discharged the hack, threw off her bonnet, and took her place at the head of the happy procession, where every young face beamed with joy.

They were ranged in order at the two long tables, where even the breakfast, on this day of plenty, was a sumptuous feast.

All the children sat down together, and the matron, the teacher and their young visitor waited on the table, taking their own breakfast by sips and bites between services.

After breakfast the children were marched into the school-room, where they took their seats in their accustomed places, and where, on the teacher's desk, the Christmas presents were arranged.

Eldiva and Nerissa had but one regret—that Lance had not made his appearance; there was no time to wait for him on such a busy day; but just as the teacher had stepped upon the little platform on which stood her desk, a bustle was heard at the door, followed by the entrance of the young midshipman, who came hurrying up the room.

After a bow to Mrs. Dunn, he turned to Eldiva and Nerissa, grasped a hand of each, and wished them a happy Christmas, and said:

"I am late. I was detained, but I am just in time. What is my part in the programme?"

"Your part," said Eldiva, "is to hand the presents as the girls come up to receive them. Stand here on my left. I shall call out the names as I pick up the parcels.

She took the first that came to hand and read from the label attached to it the name of the girl for whom it was intended.

"Mary Evans."

A little blue-eyed child of four years old left her seat and came timidly up to the teacher's desk, where she received a pretty doll, at which she stared in such dazed delight as to forget her courtesy, until gently admonished by her teacher.

Then, indeed, she dipped stiffly, and added gratuitously, as she raised her blue eyes timidly to the smiling midshipman's face:

"Sanky, sir, ezzer so much."

And she went back to her seat in rapture, to nurse her baby.

Eldiva took up the next parcel, read the label, passed it to Lance, and called out:

"Jane Hopkins."

A dark-eyed girl of fourteen came shyly and awkwardly up to the desk, and received a roll of cherry-colored ribbon, made the regulation courtesy, and retreated, pleased, but in silence.

And so on through the whole school until all the presents were distributed.

Then the teacher dismissed the children, and the matron led them off to the wardrobe-room to prepare to go to church.

"This was one of the pleasantest tasks that I ever had to perform," said Lancelot. "And now will you come with me into the parlor, where I left some parcels?" he inquired, leading the way from the schoolroom into the

parlor, where there was a roaring hickory wood fire burning in the open chimney that made the plain place seem bright and cheerful on this Christmas morning.

There was a table standing before the fire with chairs around and near it, and on it some parcels, large and small, done up in paper.

"Let us sit here, for I am tired, as the walk from Fuller's is not a short one, and I almost ran," said Lance, as he threw himself into a chair at the table.

Eldiva and Nerissa followed his example, and then Lance drew the largest parcel toward himself, untied and opened it, displaying a capacious Russia leather bag.

"I have brought you this, Eldiva, hoping that it may be useful, because I know you go out shopping for the school, and often come home with your hands full of small parcels. Will you have it?" he said.

"Why, you very thoughtful young gentleman, yes. I accept with thanks. It is the very article of all else that I need most. And with such convenient pockets," said Eldiva, as she unlocked the bag and examined its interior.

"And for you, dear Nea, to teach you the value of time and of punctuality, I have brought these," said Lance, as he opened a small parcel, took a gold watch and chain from the case and hung them around the neck of the young girl.

"Oh, you dear Lance, to remember how I always longed for a watch and chain," cried the girl, gratefully and joyously.

Lance smiled at her and opened a third parcel, containing a black lynx fur muff and tippet, saying:

"I want you to give these, with my love, to Mrs. Dunn."

"Are you a magacian, Lance? How did you know the dear woman had no furs and needed them desperately?" inquired Eldiva.

"Well—I—guessed it all," smiled the youth.

"And now, Lance, dear, your turn must come. Here, Lance, are twelve dozen linen handkerchiefs, all marked with your name. A monotonous number, dear boy, but, then, I fancy when you get to sea you will want them all."

"That I shall, Diva, and use them all, and think of you every time I pick one up! Thank you, dear."

"Now, then, Nea, love, offer *your* gift," whispered Eldiva.

"*You* please do it, Diva," murmured the girl.

"Lance, dear," then said the young lady, as she unwrapped a square parcel and displayed a Russian leather box, "here is something very handsome and handy which I am sure you have not yet met with, as it is quite new. It is a naval officer's dressing-case completely filled with the very best Sheffield. And notice its quaint label on the top: 'MORNING EXERCISES.' It is *Nea's* Christmas offering to *you,* Lance."

"Oh, what a superb gift!" began the young man, taking the case in his hand and opening it to admire its glittering appointments of shining steel and beaming ivory, and he was about to lavish grateful praise on Nerissa when the girl gravely stopped him by saying:

"No, no, no, no!—don't, Lance, don't! It was Eldiva who purchased that case and gave it to me so that I might have something to give to you. But, after all, I did not give it. I had nothing to give. Oh, how dreadful—how very dreadful it is to be poor when one wants to give!"

There was such a wail of passionate longing and re-

gret in her voice that both her young companions looked on her in dismay.

Lance knew not how to answer her.

It was Eldiva who spoke:

"Dear Nerissa, give us your love. That is the most precious gift in the world, and it is all we want of you," she said.

"I do give you that! You know I do! But I want to be rich! Oh, I want to be rich, so I may have something to give—especially to Lance!" she wailed.

The young midshipman put his arm about her and drew her to his heart as he whispered:

"*Nearest and Dearest,* when the right time comes I shall ask you to give me the most precious treasure that the world contains for me. I shall ask you to give me no less than yourself."

Something in the ardor of that pure embrace—something in the earnestness of those words, and tones, and glances—caused the girl to shrink and slip away from the youth's arms in a shy, half-frightened rapture.

"Have I distressed you, little Nea?" he whispered, bending over her.

"Oh, no, no, no, dear Lance, you have not! You never have!" she answered, trembling with happiness.

"And when the right time comes, Nea, and I ask you for yourself——" he whispered.

"I will give myself to you with all my soul, Lance! Why, am I not already your own, Lance? Haven't I always been yours? Did not my dear mother give me to you over and over again? And has she not left me to you? And oh, here!—here is something sacred that *was* my mother's, and that is mine, and I can give it to you now."

And the girl disengaged a plain gold ring from its ribbon around her throat and handed it to him.

The young man received it gravely, and gazed at it curiously.

"It was my mother's first wedding ring that my father placed on her finger. She took it off and laid it away for me, the morning she was married to your father, Lance. And before she died she gave it to me, and I have worn it on a ribbon around my neck ever since. The ribbon has been changed many times, but the ring never. See, Lance! It was too large for any of my fingers, for my dear mother had plump hands and mine are thin; but the ring will fit your little finger, Lance, and you must take it, because you see it is *all* I have of my very own to give you," she said, as she took the ring and placed it on the little finger of his left hand —the only one it would fit.

"I will wear this ring for your sake, dear Nea, and for the sake of her who is in Heaven, until that time for which I hope shall come, and then I will place it on your own finger, with a vow that shall be for time and eternity."

So earnest had been their conversation that they did not observe that Eldiva had left the room; but now the tumultuous descent of all the orphans from the upper floor, dressed in their Sunday suits, with wadded capes and hoods, to go to church, roused both from their *tête-à-tête.*

Nea ran upstairs to get her bonnet and mantle, and soon returned.

Lance was waiting for her in the front hall, and gave her his arm to take her out.

And they followed the procession of orphan girls that

had already started for the church, headed by their matron and their teacher.

The Christmas Day passed off pleasantly, and the evening was spent in games, at which Lance and Nerissa assisted with as much enjoyment as did the orphans.

During the Christmas Holidays the young midshipman, who lodged at Fuller's, was a frequent visitor to his relatives at the asylum.

But after New Year changes and separations ensued.

It was decided that Nerissa should go to school to make up for much lost time.

The girl, who was all docility, suffered herself to be disposed of by Eldiva and Lance; and these two guardians placed her at the Academy of the Visitation at Georgetown, where she was to be kept at her studies, with the privilege of coming out once a month to visit her cousin Eldiva.

Nerissa was scarcely well settled at the Academy when Lancelot Roslyn received orders to report for duty at the Naval Station at Key West, on the coast of Florida.

So, after taking a tender leave of Nerissa at her school and of Eldiva at the asylum, the young midshipman departed for his post.

CHAPTER XII

"TIME THE AVENGER"

THREE years have passed since those memorable Christmas holidays which witnessed the return of Lancelot Roslyn from his long cruise and the rescue of Nerissa Lovel from her bitter bondage.

Three times has Christmas come and gone, with all its sacred services and its gay festivities, and the fourth Christmas is at hand, when we resume the thread of our story.

This interval has been so uneventful to the persons of this story that its history may be summed up in a few lines:

Lord John Daw and his party have been traveling in the Far East—that *Ultimate Thule* of modern times, which was the world of the past ages, but which is now seldom traversed, except by professional explorers.

Old Mr. and Mrs. Jubal Wells, of gay and festive memory, have not grown a day older in aspect, or in character, and still keep open house at Bloomfield Farm for all their relatives and friends, all summer, and still come every winter to Washington, though now, and ever since the shutting up of Shadow Hall, they have been obliged to take lodgings at a "tavern." Public houses were not called "hotels" in the days of early Washington, they were either "inns" or "taverns."

Mrs. Dunn was still the matron of the Protestant Female Orphans' Asylum. After hearing from her absent son once a month, she had fallen into hearing from him once in two months, and now, since he had been traveling in the Far East, she heard from him only once in six months.

Time and habit had gradually reconciled Ruth Dunn to the prolonged separation from that only son which, had she anticipated it at the early hour of parting, must have broken her heart, or crazed her brain, or killed her quite.

Eldiva was still at her post as teacher in the Protestant Female Orphan Asylum. The problem of her life

was still unsolved. Yet she found peace, if not happiness, in the quiet routine of her duties.

For some time she had received letters from Lord John Daw and his son, but as these remained unanswered they gradually ceased to come.

She continued, at regular intervals, her visits to the mysterious grave in the Congress Burying Ground, of which she gave no explanation.

Neil Carnes had never been heard from and his whereabouts was a mystery to his relatives—for friends he now had none.

Eldiva had seized the first opportunity of informing Mr. and Mrs. Jubal Wells of his treachery toward Nerissa; and in answer to one of his fraudulent letters, enclosing another forgery, purporting to be a letter from Nerissa in Paris, she had written back only these words:

"You need not burden your soul with any more crimes on our account. Nerissa is found, and is in the hands of her legal guardians, who have placed her at school at the Academy of the Visitation in Georgetown. We do not anticipate that you will trouble her there; but if you should return to your native country, you will be provided for in the State Prison."

Old Mr. Jubal Wells, to whom Eldiva had confided the story of Neil Carnes' treachery and Nerissa Lovel's wrongs, told her that she had been indiscreet to write in such a strain to the absent villain; and he said further that she should have waited patiently and received all the fraudulent letters he choose to write to her, and that she should have kept them carefully, giving him, so to speak, "rope enough to hang himself" withal—effectually, piling up evidence against a day of judgment—"wrath against a day of wrath."

But this young lady was too honest, too spirited, too impulsive, to be such a time-server, and so the sharp, stinging, terrible letter was written and dispatched, and the result was that Eldiva was troubled by no more communications from Neil Carnes.

Nerissa Lovel had remained all these years at her school, where she had studied so perseveringly and to such advantage, that, at the close of the third year, she had graduated at the head of the highest class.

Since her graduation she had continued at the Academy as a parlor boarder until such time as her guardians could make some other provision for her.

Lancelot Roslyn had remained at his post at the naval station at Key West.

Only three times, and each time at Christmas, had he obtained leave to visit his friends in Washington.

On each of these occasions he had met Nerissa at the Asylum, whither she always came to spend her Christmas with Eldiva.

This was the aspect of affairs with our friends on the 20th of December, 18—.

It was a clear, cold, frosty night, with moon and stars shining with preternatural brilliancy down upon a landscape of frosted silver.

Within the parlor of the Asylum the atmosphere was warm and ruddy.

The room was more comfortably furnished than when we saw it three years ago. There was a crimson carpet on the floor, and crimson curtains at the windows.

There was a fine hickory-wood fire burning in the open chimney, with a bright brass fender before it, and a pot of chocolate simmering on the hearth.

There was a pretty eight-day clock on the mantel-

piece, whose hands pointed to the hour of half-past nine.

In two arm-chairs, placed at a table before the fire, sat Ruth Dunn and Eldiva Daw, engaged in some light needle-work, and otherwise resting after their day's labor was over.

The children were all in bed, and the house was closed up for the night.

Ruth Dunn glanced up at the clock and sighed.

"It is too late now to hope for a letter to-night. Yet I did *feel one coming* after I saw in the *Intelligencer* of this morning that the ship *Bombay* had arrived with mails from the Indies. Ah, well! 'Hope deferred maketh the heart sick' indeed, but it never kills, else I should have been dead long ago!" concluded the lady, as she picked up and renewed the sewing that she had dropped for a few minutes on her lap.

"There is scarcely time yet for the mails to have reached Washington and to have been distributed. I think that to-morrow is really the earliest day that we have any reason to expect the foreign mail. Cheer up, Ruth, dear!" said Eldiva, smiling.

"Dear girl, I do not easily give way to despondency, as you know, but——"

"Rat-tat-tat-tat-tat!"

A resounding rap at the front door startled both women and stopped their talk, and Eldiva ran out into the hall to answer the knock.

It was John Schofield, the Quaker letter-carrier, with a full mailbag.

"Good evening, Friend Eldiva! It is a cold night, and growing colder. I think the river will be frozen over before morning. I have a handful of letters for

thee and for Friend Ruth," said the carrier, diving into his bag and trying to look over the letters.

"Do come into the parlor, Mr. Schofield. I am sure you cannot see anything in this darkness," exclaimed the young lady, in a fever of impatience, as she led the way and opened the parlor door.

"Verily, I will follow thy counsel, Friend Eldiva. The light and warmth of thy habitation is very comforting to the outward man. Good evening, Friend Ruth. Verily, I am late this evening. This season doth crowd the mails, and the arrival of the East Indianman——"

"Have you any letters for *me,* Mr. Schofield?" impatiently demanded Ruth Dunn, who had risen to meet the carrier and cut short his slow speech.

"Yea, verily I have, Friend Ruth!" replied the Quaker, taking his mailbag off his hip, placing it upon the table, and sitting himself down unceremoniously in one of the arm-chairs.

Both the women stood anxiously bending over him while he selected and handed out the letters.

"Three for thee, Friend Ruth, all foreign letters, brought by the *Bombay,* thee sees," he said, handing a trio of bulky packets to the elder lady.

"And two for thee, Friend Eldiva, but not from foreign ports," he added, passing a couple of letters to the younger lady.

Eldiva glanced at their superscriptions and postmarks, saw that one was from Key West, in the handwriting of Lance Roslyn, and the other from Bloomfield, in that of Mr. Jubal Wells. Then Eldiva looked at the cold and shivering postman, who had again slung his mailbag over his shoulders and was preparing to

sally forth once more for his long tramp through the frosty night, and she said:

"Mr. Schofield, won't you let me give you a cup of hot chocolate? See! we have a pot of it all ready made on the hearth."

"Verily, Friend Eldiva, I will accept the same with thanks," gratefully replied the carrier, as he subsided into the arm-chair with a sigh of satisfaction.

Eldiva went to the glass corner cupboard and took out a large china cup, which she brought to the fire, filled with the rich, luscious, steaming beverage and presented it to the postman.

"Verily, this doth greatly comfort the inner man, Friend Ruth," said Schofield, turning to the elder lady.

But *she* was too deeply absorbed in the letter she was reading to hear what he was saying.

"Shall I fill your cup again, Mr. Schofield?" inquired Eldiva, repressing a smile of amusement with which she had witnessed the man drink down the almost boiling chocolate at a draught.

"Yea, verily, if it pleaseth thee, Friend Eldiva, for even as Esau was saved by the mess of pottage, for which he did not deem the price of his birthright too high, 'for all that a man hath will he give for his life,' even so do I feel that my strength is sustained, so that I am saved by this beverage which thy hand hath prepared," said the postman, with another deep sigh of satisfaction, as he passed the cup.

Eldiva filled it to the brim and gave it to him, with the fervent hope that he would swallow its contents as quickly as might be consistent with his safety, for she was eagerly impatient to read her letters.

But the letter-carrier drank off this second cup more slowly, stretching out his feet before the blazing fire,

and warming them between the sips, as he meditatively remarked:

"The beverage brewed from the cake called chocolate, and manufactured from the nut of an Indian tree, doth long retain its heat. This taken within the inner man will keep the outward cold from penetrating. Friend Eldiva, I thank thee," he said, setting down the empty cup at last.

As soon as he had gone and she had locked the front door after him, Eldiva ran back into the parlor, threw herself into a chair, and opened Lance's letter, from which dropped a check on the Bank of Washington for twenty dollars. The letter itself was very short and ran as follows:

U. S. Store Ship Ceres,
Key West, Florida, Dec. 13th, 18—.

Dearest Diva: Too busy to write much now. Only write to tell you that I shall be with you on Christmas Eve, at latest. Please have Nea in time to meet me.

I inclose the usual check for the Orphan Children's Christmas presents, on my usual conditions, that is—*Don't* get them anything useful or improving—*don't.* Orphan children in "institutions" are, as a rule, utilized and improved into a state of idiocy or hypocrisy. So don't buy them pious pocket-handkerchiefs, or story books about good little children who were ill very long and died very young. Our Divine Saviour, when He was on earth, never preached to little children; they could not, perhaps, have understood preaching. *"He took them in His arms and blessed them."* They could understand *that.*

So let me leave the higher *rôle* of instructing, improving and utilizing the orphan girls to you and the

matron and the lady managers, and do the humble duty of delighting the little ones. Give dollies to the babies, and ribbons to the girls, or whatever they like best.

I have got my lieutenancy and a three-months' furlough, and when I reach Washington City I shall ask our dear Nea's permission to place upon her finger that sacred ring of her mother's which she entrusted to my keeping. And you know what that means.

Remember me to Mrs. Dunn, and believe me ever your affectionate cousin, LANCELOT ROSLYN.

"This young gentleman has contracted the vice of a very careless and frivolous style of writing, against which I must warn him. And, I suppose, now that he has got his promotion, he wants to marry Nerissa—taking his bride out of the convent; quite in the old-fashioned French form. Well, perhaps it is the best thing, under the circumstances, that could be done. They are both young, but not too young. And the girl cannot board forever at the convent. So I think we shall have a wedding," Eldiva reflected, as she enfolded Lance's letter and opened that of her uncle, Jubal Wells, which was not at all an exponent of that jovial old gentleman's real character, or an expression of his best feelings, but a specimen of the stilted, formal style of his own age and time.

Uncle Jubal was natural and delightful in his family circle, and in conversation; but the instant "he took his pen in hand to avail himself of the opportunity"—and he *always* did this when he wrote a letter—he became artificial and ceremonious—as follows:

BLOOMFIELD FARM, ST. MARY'S COUNTY.

TO MRS. JOHN DAW.—*Honored Madam and My Dear Niece*: I take my pen in hand to avail myself of

this favorable opportunity of writing to you to inform you that your aunt, myself and our household are all in excellent health, and to express our sincere hope that you, our dear niece, and all your worthy friends are enjoying the same signal blessing for which, as for all other mercies, we ought, at all times and in all seasons, to return most humble and hearty thanks to the bountiful Giver of every good and perfect gift, and in Whom, as the Word tells us, "we live and have our being."

Madam and dear niece, I have the honor to notify you that early in the new year your aunt and myself, together with our personal attendants, propose to give ourselves the pleasure of proceeding to the City of Washington, not only to gratify our hearts by personal intercourse with those who are bound to us by the closest ties of kindred and the strongest bonds of friendship and esteem, but also to enlarge our minds by conversation with those great men of intellect, both in the President's Cabinet and the diplomatic corps, and by attending the deliberations of our Country's Representatives and Senators in Congress assembled; for, madam—as it must clearly appear to a lady of your excellent judgment—it is the bounden duty of every citizen to make himself familiar with the policies of his Age and Nation.

There is another matter of interest, Madam, which it will become necessary to discuss with you in a personal interview, to wit:

I have recently received letters from London, giving very important information concerning a certain person of the name of Carnes, formerly of St. Mary's County, in this State, with whom we—I beg pardon, Madam—with whom I, once had the misfortune of

holding some acquaintance. I must apologize for recalling this person to your recollection, an offense which I should not presume to commit, but from the most absolute necessity.

But we will postpone this subject until I can have the honor of paying my respects to you in person a few days hence.

I will notify you, Madam, of our arrival.

Your aunt desires to be particularly remembered to you. Be pleased, therefore, madam, to accept the most earnest assurance of our united love and respect for yourself, and believe, Madam, that I have the honor to remain your affectionate uncle and most obedient servant, JOHN JUBAL WELLS.

"News of Neil Carnes!" mused Eldiva, ignoring every portion of this stilted letter except the few lines that alluded to Nerissa's false step-father—"News of *him!* I am very sorry for that. We do not want news of him. And Uncle Jubal is nearer right than he knows when he begs my pardon for mentioning the man's name."

The loud striking of the clock caused her to look up.

It was eleven o'clock, a whole hour beyond their usual bed-time.

"Ruth," she said, looking toward her companion, "shall we drink our chocolate and go to bed now? It is growing very late, you know."

But Ruth Dunn paid no attention to this appeal. She sat with her elbow on the edge of the table, and her head bowed upon her hand, either in a sound sleep or a deep reverie.

"RUTH!" again exclaimed Eldiva, in a louder voice.

This time the elder lady looked up, but with a face

so blank, so dazed and expressionless, that the younger demanded:

"Why, what is the matter with you, Ruth? Are you in a trance, or under a spell, or what?"

"I—I—what did you say, my dear?" slowly inquired the matron, with a bewildered look, as she passed her hand across her eyes, as if to clear away a cloud.

"I hope you have received no ill news, Ruth," replied Eldiva, in a low voice, and totally ignoring the previous question.

"'Ill news?'—I—yes—no—I—yes—that is, no, no, certainly not, no ill news. Quite, quite the contrary," replied the matron, at first speaking confusedly, and afterward clearly.

"I hope your son is well?" said Eldiva, still doubtingly, as she noticed the matron's disturbed manner.

"Oh, yes, he is well, very well, and so also is Lord John Daw and Mr. John Daw," added Ruth.

"I asked no questions concerning the last named gentleman," coldly remarked Eldiva.

"I—I beg your pardon, my dear, if I have been indiscreet," said Mrs. Dunn.

"Well, then, Ruth dear, since you have had no bad news, and it is going on toward midnight, shall we drink our chocolate and go to bed?" good-humoredly inquired Eldiva.

"Certainly, my dear," replied the matron, taking her letters from her lap and putting them into her pocket.

Eldiva brought two cups from the corner cupboard and filled them from the pot on the hearth, and handed one to Ruth Dunn and sat down with the other.

When they had emptied their cups, Eldiva washed

and replaced them, while Ruth took down the fire and put up the guard before the chimney-place.

Then the two women lighted their bedroom candles, put out the lamp, and went upstairs together.

Their bedrooms were on opposite sides of the upper hall. They bade each other good-night at the head of the stairs, and each entered her own apartment.

Eldiva was soon in bed and asleep.

But not so was Ruth Dunn. The matron set her candle down on the corner of the bureau, drew up a chair, seated herself and took her packet of letters from her pocket. Two of these, the most voluminous, were quite old letters; one, dated the 20th of the preceding March, came from Ispahan; the other, dated the 30th of May from Cabul. And these were filled with accounts of the writer's travels through the interior of Asia. Ruth Dunn had read them, and now she laid them aside.

The last letter was of more recent date and nearer place—Algiers, October 1st—and it was shorter than the others, and treated only of family matters. Ruth had read this also. She had read it several times over. It was this letter that had sent her into the trance-like reverie from which Eldiva had found it so difficult to arouse her.

And now she read the letter again. We will look over her shoulder and follow her eyes:

ALGIERS, Oct. 1st, 18—.

MY BELOVED MOTHER:—We are at this port waiting for a packet to take us to Marseilles, whence we shall sail immediately for the United States.

Yes, dear mother, we are certainly coming home at last.

How long Lord John Daw might have remained abroad had not an unforeseen event directed his thoughts homeward, I cannot tell. But now he is all impatience to leave this oldest of old worlds for the newest of the new ones. And in that "unforeseen event" to which I have alluded, you and I, dear mother, have a vital interest.

I must write very guardedly now, lest by some chance this letter should miss you and fall into other hands.

Dearest mother, can you think of *any* event happening to our party out here that could so vitally affect the interests of yourself, your son, and Lord John Daw, as to cause his lordship to hurry his return to the United States?

Think where we have been traveling—over the very same ground traveled more than twenty-five years ago by the eccentric explorer, Prince Alexander of Schwartzenburg and the wretched companion of his flight, Lady John Daw.

Now do you guess what I have to tell you? No, I think not. It is this, then: That Lord John Daw has received unquestionable proof that his guilty and unfortunate wife *was* really murdered by the Bedouins of the Desert, as was first reported, and that the woman carried off and sold into slavery was *not* Lady John Daw, as was afterward rumored, but her ladyship's young and beautiful maidservant, Jessie Meadows! His lordship has seen this Jessie in Algiers. She is still a fine-looking woman of about forty years of age. She told his lordship the dreadful story of the massacre in the Great Desert; how her master and mistress, with all their attendants, were cut to pieces, and how

she herself, Jessie Meadows, was the only one spared, and spared only to be taken captive.

She further informed us that she was purchased by an Algerian merchant and became his wife. She was the mother of many children, and had no desire to return to her native country.

Mother, dear mother, do you see what all this signifies?

That the second marriage of Lord John Daw was as lawful in the sight of man as in the sight of the Lord —as lawful as *he* honestly believed it to be when he contracted it.

He has heard that his second wife (I must write cautiously, you know) had emigrated to the United States, with some relatives, who went first to Washington City and then went to the West.

He thinks by returning to Washington, he may be able to trace these people to their distant home and find his wife.

I long to relieve his anxiety, but must not do so in any direct way.

I must close this letter now, because I must send it by a private hand. A gentleman friend of ours has his yacht in port and sails with the tide at noon. He has kindly consented to take charge of this letter and post it at Marseilles.

The regular mail packet does not leave this port until the first of next week. We shall sail by her for Marseilles, and thence by the first ship for the United States. It may be that we shall follow this letter very soon.

At all events, we expect to be in Washington City early in the new year.

Mother, dear mother, prepare yourself and make up

your mind what you will do! Yes, prepare yourself for more surprises, and for much that you must forgive. Yet, fear not, for all is well.

All is well. And I am always and forever, your loving and devoted son. RODERICK DUNN.

"At last! at last!" murmured Ruth Dunn to herself, as she fondly pressed this letter to her lips and then folded it and placed it in her bosom, next her heart.

Then she offered up her evening prayers, undressed and went to bed—"but not to sleep." Sleep was impossible to one whose heart and brain were so busy with the past and future.

CHAPTER XIII

TIME THE REWARDER

THE next few days were very busy ones at the asylum.

The whole establishment had to be renovated and put in festive order for Christmas.

Eldiva could render but little assistance, for she was confined all day to the duties of her school, which would not break up for the holidays until Friday evening before Christmas, which came that year on Sunday.

Only one day, therefore—Saturday—would the teacher have to execute her own commissions by purchasing the Christmas presents for the children and

then bringing Nerissa home to the asylum, to be in time to meet Lance on his return.

Yet so diligent was Ruth Dunn from early morning till late at night, and so good use did the teacher make of her very few hours before and after school each day in helping the matron forward with the work, that Friday evening found them with all their preparations completed.

And on Saturday morning Eldiva walked down to the stand at the northwest corner of the Capitol grounds and took the stage to Georgetown.

She reached the terminus on Bridge Street at about ten o'clock, and left the stage and walked on to the convent on Fayette Street.

She rang the bell at the visitors' door and was soon admitted by the aged portress and conducted by another nun into the neat parlor of the Academy.

Eldiva's face was a familiar one to the sisters. She had been a pupil in their school, some years before. Since that time she had placed her young ward there to be educated, and had visited her very frequently. She scarcely needed to ask for Nerissa. The nun who attended her knew very well whom she had come to see, and said at once:

"Miss Lovel has been looking for you all the morning, madam. She will be down in a few moments."

And, in fact, in less than ten minutes after the nun had left the parlor to call the young lady, Nerissa entered, dressed for her ride and carrying a portly valise in her hand.

She dropped the valise and went into the arms of Eldiva, who had risen to receive her.

"Oh, darling, I knew you would come early, so I got

all ready to go with you at once—not to keep you waiting," said Nerissa, after the first warm embrace.

"You are looking well, dear Nea," said the lady, holding off the girl that she might gaze in her lovely face.

"Oh, I am well—very well," replied Nerissa, with a rosy blush at her beauty being praised. "And you, dearest Diva! How are you?" she inquired, looking wistfully into the pale face of her friend.

"I never was better, love."

"And Lance! Dear Lance! Has he arrived?"

"Do you not suppose, love, that if Lance had arrived he would have come with me to fetch you home?"

"Oh, yes; yes! indeed he would! But he wrote to me that he would be in Washington on Christmas Eve," said Nerissa.

"So he wrote to me also. And he will surely keep his word, if no unforeseen event should happen to delay him," replied the lady.

"Oh, Diva, darling, do you think anything of that sort could have happened?"

"No, sweet—nothing. Christmas Eve has only just begun. Lance will probably come before night."

"Oh, I hope he will! I hope he will!" fervently prayed the girl, clasping her hands closely in the intersity of her emotion.

"He has never yet failed us on Christmas Eve, and he is not likely to do so now. Nerissa, dear, I have had a letter from Uncle Jubal Wells," said Eldiva, by way of changing the conversation.

"Oh, you have!" exclaimed the girl, instantly interested. "And is he and Aunt Joyce coming up to Washington this winter?"

"Oh, of course they are! Do you think that gay

young couple ever mean to miss a fashionable season in Washington?" smiled the lady.

"You needn't smile at the thought of their jollity, Diva! Those two always seem like a pair of children to me. And do you know, Diva, I think that if we all could be 'changed in the twinkling of an eye,' as in the last day, that Uncle Jubal and Aunt Joyce would appear younger than you or I? For, inside of themselves, they *are* younger than we are."

"Very likely they have not done any harm, or had any trouble in their lives," replied Eldiva.

"While you and I, if we have not done much harm, have had very much trouble. Is that what you mean, Diva?"

"Yes, Nea; let us not speak of that in these Christmas times. And yet, I must name a man who was the cause of much trouble to you, dearest."

"Mr. Neil Carnes?" suggested Nerissa, in a low voice.

"Yes. Uncle Jubal writes that he—Carnes—has been heard from."

"Oh! I am so sorry, Diva! I never wanted to hear of him again. I have forgiven him—indeed, I *hope* I have forgiven him; but I want to *forget* him, too. He oppresses me! Oh! he stifles me! The very room feels close since you have named him. Are you rested, Diva? If so, let us go. To think how mere names affect us, Diva! The names of Uncle Jubal and Aunt Joyce brought the feeling of springtime flowers, and fresh, balmy air in green country lanes; and the name of Neil Carnes—oh! let us go, dear Diva, if you are rested."

"I am not tired, and we will go at once. You are very fanciful, child!" said the lady, as she arose and

drew around her the rich India shawl which was the one remnant of her short-lived wealth, which, for its simple comfortableness, she permitted herself to wear now.

The aged portress unlocked the door and passed them out.

When they found themselves in the street, Eldiva called a boy who was lounging at the corner, and hired him to carry Nerissa's valise as far as the stage stand on Bridge Street.

There they took the stage for Washington, and rode as far as Seventh Street and Pennsylvania Avenue, where they got out near Rachendorff's confectionery and toy store.

"We will go in here, where I have to buy the usual Christmas dolls—Lance's donation to the children, you know—and where we can leave your valise to be sent home with the merchandise," said Eldiva, as they entered the shop.

One of the shopmen came immediately to wait on them; for he recognized in Eldiva the young lady who on every Christmas Eve invested about fifteen dollars in cheap dolls.

When the selections were made and paid for, Eldiva placed them beside the heavy valise, which the shopman readily promised to deliver with the dolls.

From Rachendorff's they walked down to Lankpheir's millinery, where the ribbons were purchased, and as they made but a small bundle, brought away.

Finally they turned their steps toward the asylum, where they arrived about two o'clock, and where they found a dainty dinner prepared for them by the orders of Mrs. Dunn.

After dinner they went into the parlor, where

Nerissa assisted Eldiva in cutting the ribbon into pieces of two yards each, and labeling each slip with the name of the prospective recipient.

Then Eldiva took out her letters from Lance and from Mr. Jubal Wells, and gave them to Nerissa to read.

When the girl had read them, Eldiva inquired archly:

"What does Lieutenant Roslyn *mean* by saying that when he returns he shall ask your permission to replace upon your finger a ring that you took off and gave him three years ago?"

"Oh!" replied Nerissa, frankly, yet with a deep blush, "it was my dear mother's wedding ring that I gave him three years ago, when I had nothing else to give for a Christmas gift, and which he said he would keep and guard faithfully until the proper time should come, when he would replace it on my finger—and—and—and——"

"And—*what,* dear girl?"

"And—marry me, I think he meant," replied Nea, in an almost inaudible whisper.

"Oh!" exclaimed Eldiva, in a pretended illumination.

At that moment Jane Hopkins, the eldest of the orphans, a girl who had been at the institution from its beginning, entered with a heavy valise on her arm, and a huge though light parcel on her shoulder.

She let down both upon the parlor carpet saying:

"A young man left 'em for *you,* Mrs. Daw."

"Very well, Jenny; you may leave them just where they are. I will attend to them," replied the lady.

And Jane Hopkins made the regulation courtesy and left the room.

"Come, Nerissa. Take up your valise, my dear, and we will go upstairs and dress for the evening. Lance may arrive at any moment now," said Eldiva, as she took the bundle of dolls and placed them in the lower compartment of the corner cupboard, and then led the way out of the room.

An hour later both these young persons returned to the parlor in the *demi-toilette* beyond which neither of them ever ventured.

Between the woman of twenty-eight and the girl of eighteen there seemed not so much difference in age as there really was.

Both were two beautiful brunettes—with a difference.

Eldiva's hair and eyes were black as thick night, and her complexion was creamy pale, her form slight, small and plump. She was dressed in a plain black silk, with little lace frills about her throat and wrists, and a little lace cap on her clustering black curls. The long gold watch chain that held her watch, and was doubled twice over her bosom, was the only piece of jewelry she wore.

Nerissa's hair and eyes were dark brown; her complexion blooming in richness of color on cheeks and lips. She was an inch or two taller than Eldiva, and somewhat thinner. She wore a rich black silk—one of Eldiva's dresses altered to suit the times—and a lace fischu crossed over her bosom and tied behind her back, and her hair half covered with a gold thread net.

"We will begin to label the dolls," said Eldiva; "that work will occupy us until tea time, and help to pass away the interval before the arrival of Lance."

"Oh! I hope nothing has happened to prevent his coming to us!" said Nerissa.

"Nothing has happened, you may be sure, or we should have heard it. 'Ill news travels quickly,' you know," replied Eldiva, cheerfully.

"But he never was so late in coming before," sighed Nerissa.

"Never mind!—An extra number of passengers to land might account for an hour's delay," said Eldiva, as she took the great bundle of dolls from the corner cupboard and brought it and laid it upon the table before the fire.

"You think he will certainly come to-night, Diva?"

"I think he will certainly come! Now, Nea, dear, there is the book with the school list, and there is pen, ink and paper at your end of the table. Sit down there, and copy the list of all except the senior class on that paper, and cut the names in slips and hand them to me. I will pin them on the dolls," said Eldiva, as she sat down and began to untie the bundle.

The two ladies were soon absorbed in their work, so absorbed that they did not hear the door open, or a soft step advance, or suspect the presence of a third party. They both had their heads bent down over their work, when a hand was softly laid on each.

Both started and looked up in an instant. Both simultaneously cried out:

"LANCE! LANCE!"

It was the young lieutenant who stood laughing between them.

"Lance! Why—who let you in?" demanded Eldiva.

He did not answer until he had kissed *her* hurriedly two or three times, and kissed Nerissa two or three dozen. Then he said:

"Uncle Ambrose. I came around the back way and Uncle Ambrose let me up the back stairs, so I could

creep in upon you unawares! Well! here I am, just in time to label these dolls, as I have done for the last three years. Come, Nea!

'A substitute shines brightly as a king,
When not the king is there,'

and no doubt you have done well in my place. But I am here now, and must request you to abdicate," said Lance, good humoredly, as he drew an armchair to the fire and bowed to Nea, as a sign that she must take it.

Nerissa laughed, and left her seat at the table and sank into the comfortable rocker that had been brought for her by Lance.

Lance himself took her vacated place and assumed her office.

Eldiva asked many questions as to his promotion, his furlough, and his future prospects, and Lance answered them as satisfactorily as he was able to do, telling her, however, little more than he had told her in his letter—namely, that he had been promoted to his lieutenancy and had his three months' furlough.

"I shall be ordered *somewhere* about the last of March, but I have not the least idea whether it will be to the Mediterranean Sea or to the Pacific or Indian Ocean. But to some foreign service, certainly. So that my professional prospects are somewhat vague. My private lookout is, I hope, more certain," concluded the young man, with a joyous glance toward Nerissa.

While they talked, Jane Hopkins came in with her prim, little courtesy, and Mrs. Dunn's compliments, to know when they would be ready for tea.

"Ask Mrs. Dunn please to keep it back for fifteen minutes until we finish this work, Jenny," said Eldiva.

And the girl disappeared, and the work went on to its completion.

Then Eldiva went out to notify the matron that she might ring the tea-bell.

As soon as she had left the room, Lance drew his chair to the side of Nerissa's, took the girl's hand, and whispered:

"Nea, nearest and dearest, when shall I place this ring upon your finger?"

"Whenever you and Eldiva and Uncle and Aunt Wells think it best that you should, Lance," she answered, frankly.

"Oh, dear! Are so many people to have a voice in our destiny, dear Nea? Say, cannot you and I decide for ourselves? Or, at least, taking Eldiva into our confidence, can we not leave out our old aunt and uncle?" inquired the young man.

"No, for Uncle Jubal and Aunt Joyce are coming to the city directly after New Year, and they must be consulted, Lance. I do not think, however, that they will object to anything that you and Diva decide upon," said the girl.

"And if I and Diva decide upon a speedy union of Lance and Nea—what then? Will you consent?" inquired the young man, drawing the girl closer to his side.

"Yes, Lance, yes."

He sealed the contract with a kiss, and then said:

"If I should be ordered to the Mediterranean, dear Nea, would you have the courage to go out alone in a merchant ship to rejoin me at some port where I might be stationed for a time?"

"Oh, yes, indeed, Lance. But why can I not go in your ship with you?"

"Because it would be against the rules, my dear."

"Mrs. Fitzgerald went a voyage with Captain Fitzgerald, and Mrs. Gamble with Captain Gamble from our own neighborhood."

"Yes, love, the captains have occasionally taken out their wives with them, but no lower officer, as far as I know. And it is now rumored that, upon account of the dissatisfaction this has caused, even the captains will no longer be privileged in this respect. No, Nea, love, you will have to remain here until my return from my next cruise, or else go out in a merchant ship to some foreign port to rejoin me. It is for you to choose which you will do."

"Then I choose to go out to you, Lance," said the girl.

The ringing of a bell stopped their conversation.

"Come, Lance," said Nea, rising, "we will go in to tea."

They went into the dining-room, where a dainty supper was spread, and where Mrs. Dunn welcomed the young lieutenant as an old friend.

Jane Hopkins waited on the table.

After tea the three friends returned to the parlor and resumed their seats and their chat.

"As to-morrow is Sunday as well as Christmas, the presents cannot be distributed until Monday morning."

"No, I suppose not. Well, I shall be on hand then to assist," replied Lance.

"Did I tell you that Uncle and Aunt Wells are coming to the city after New Year?" inquired Eldiva.

"Nea told me; but I should have known the fact of myself. They *always* come at this season, do they not?" inquired Lance.

"Yes, of course. But did Nea tell you that Uncle

Jubal had received some very important news from London, concerning Neil Carnes?" demanded Eldiva.

"No, she did not!" said Lance, in surprise.

"I never like to talk of that man, you know, Eldiva," explained Nerissa.

"What news is this of which you speak, Eldiva?" questioned Lance.

"He did not specify in his letter to me. He wrote with some mystery, telling me that he could only discuss the subject in a personal interview," answered the lady.

"If Uncle Jubal said the news was important it must be *very* important! He never exaggerates. He rather understates than otherwise. I wonder what his news can be. Have you any idea, Diva?"

"Not the slightest," answered the lady.

"Well, we shall know when he comes!" exclaimed the young lieutenant, as he arose to bid his cousin and his betrothed good-night.

And he left them with the promise to return early in the morning to go with them to church.

CHAPTER XIV

WAITING FOR THE END

The Christmas Sabbath dawned brilliantly. A light snow had fallen during the night, but the sky had cleared toward morning and the rising sun shone over the whitened ground and powdered roofs and trees in wintry splendor and beauty.

Lance arrived at the asylum soon after breakfast in good time to escort Nerissa to church.

Mrs. Dunn and Eldiva went with the children of the institution—the teacher at the head and the matron at the foot of the procession.

After church the children dined in their long dining-room on the good things provided for them, and which the matron, the teacher, and their two young guests helped to serve.

Two hours later, Mrs. Dunn, Eldiva, Nerissa and Lance ate their Christmas dinner together in the parlor.

The afternoon and evening were spent very quietly, all merry-making being deferred until the next day.

At an early hour Lance bade his friends good-night, with the promise to return early in the morning to assist in the distribution of Christmas presents to the orphans as he had done for the last three years.

As soon as Lance had gone, Nerissa complained of fatigue, and said that she would like to go to bed.

"For you know, Diva, that I have been accustomed to such *very* early hours at the convent," pleaded the girl.

"Very well, my love. Kiss me good-night and go. I have to see Mrs. Dunn for a few minutes, and then I will join you," said Eldiva.

And Nerissa kissed her cousin good-night, although they shared the same room and bed.

"I shall be asleep before you come up, Diva," said Nerissa, drowsily.

"So be it, love. I shall not wake you," replied Eldiva.

And when Nea had crept sleepily upstairs, Diva went in search of Ruth Dunn. She merely wished to ask the matron to allow the children to rise and leave their dormitory an hour earlier than usual the next morning, because the little creatures were so eager to receive their

presents that Lance had promised to come and distribute to them before breakfast.

Eldiva went through all the lower rooms of the house without finding the matron, and then she went upstairs, and seeing the gleam of a light under the door of Mrs. Dunn's room, which was directly opposite her own, she went there and rapped.

"Come in!" said the deep, rich voice of the matron—that voice for whose rare music "the crazy lord" had bent his ears to listen years before.

Eldiva entered and closed the door behind her.

The matron's room was very plain, with white-washed walls, white window curtains, white bed, stained pine bureau and washstand, a cane rocking chair, and one other chair, and a stained pine table drawn up before the little wood fire.

Ruth Dunn was seated at this table with an open japan box before her.

"I disturb you; you are busy," said Eldiva, deprecatingly.

"Oh, no, not at all. Take that rocking-chair and draw up to the fire. Put your feet on the fender. It is a cold night," said Ruth, pleasantly.

Eldiva sat down and made her little petition.

Ruth granted it at once.

The teacher arose to leave the room.

"Don't go," said the matron.

"But I interrupt you," replied Eldiva.

"Oh, not at all. I have spent this evening in a luxury that I have not often permitted myself—that is, reading over all my Roderick's letters. A sort of communing with him this Christmas evening, you know. By the way, did I tell you that he was on his way home?" inquired Ruth.

"No!" exclaimed Eldiva, in a tone of pleased surprise.

"Ah, no; I remember now how it was that I did not. You rather discouraged me, my dear, when I would have been communicative."

"In regard to Mr. Dunn's employers, not in regard to himself. I shall be very glad to hear any good news of your son, any good news that would affect your happiness, Ruth."

"Thank you, my dear. I thought you would sympathize with me, so far as to be happy to hear my son is coming home. Ah, my dear! If I could have *dreamed* how long his absence would be, I think the first parting must have killed me; but time and habit inure us to these things. You never met my son, I think you told me?"

"No," said Eldiva, gently.

"Now, do you know that I think it is very strange you did not. He was his lordship's private secretary and lived at The Hill all the time—I beg your pardon—I am again on forbidden ground," suddenly exclaimed Ruth Dunn, with an expression of so much regret that Eldiva, to reassure her, in a quiet way, answered simply:

"I knew that his lordship had a private secretary, but I was under the impression that he was the hunchback scholar whom I occasionally passed on the stairs, who was certainly also in his lordship's employment in some such capacity—perhaps as librarian; I do not know. I only know that I never met Mr. Dunn. But, Ruth, I should be *very glad* to meet your son when he comes," said the lady, turning a countenance beaming with affection upon the fond mother.

"Thank you, love. I can well believe it, for you are so full of sympathy," replied Mrs. Dunn.

"When does he come?" inquired Eldiva.

"Early in the new year he hopes to be in Washington."

"With *his party?*" inquired Eldiva.

"Yes, with his employers," replied Ruth, who was again removing every letter and parcel from the japan box, as if in search of something hard to find.

Eldiva fell into a grave and thoughtful silence.

"I had a pencil sketch of Roderick, drawn by his classmate at college, Charley King, you know, who has now a studio on Twelfth Street, and is getting quite famous as a portrait painter. The sketch is a perfect likeness of Roderick as he appeared on his twenty-first birthday. He gave it to me when he was going away, and I am sure I put it into this box," explained Ruth, as she continued her search.

"People often hide things so carefully that they cannot find them," observed Eldiva, with a smile.

"So they do," assented Ruth. "Ah! here it is now just where I might have expected to come upon it—in the lowest compartment of the box, at the very bottom of everything else," she laughed, as she drew a small, flat parcel, in silver tissue paper, from its secret receptable.

"I am glad you have found it," said Eldiva, bending toward her with amiable intent.

Ruth opened the parcel, which contained not only the pencil sketch of Roderick Dunn, but—something else, at sight of which Ruth Dunn looked surprised and annoyed.

Recovering herself after a moment's hesitation, she

drew out the sketch, pressed it fondly to her lips, and then passed it on to Eldiva, saying, proudly:

"There is my Roderick. Tell me what you think of him."

Eldiva took the picture with a smile, and looked at it; but the smile vanished as she started, and gazed until every vestige of color had fled from her face, leaving even her lips pale as death.

Ruth, watching for some expression of admiration, saw the start, the sudden change, the deadly pallor, and drew her own conclusions.

"Ah! poor darling!" she said to herself; "she sees the likeness, and it has upset her. I should have thought of that! But never mind; I have something else here that may divert her thoughts from that unlucky likeness," said the kindly woman to herself, as she affected to take no notice of her companion's disturbance, but turned the little parcel of silver tissue and drew from it a small, gossamer lace pocket-handkerchief, neatly folded, but very yellow from long keeping.

By this time Eldiva had recovered her composure, but not her color.

"This, then, is your son, Mr. Roderick Dunn?" she said, in a very low voice, that it required an effort to make steady.

"Yes, that is Roderick," replied the mother, in a deprecating manner, as if mutely making the apology she dared not speak.

"He is very handsome," said Eldiva, in the same low, constrained tone.

"I think so; but I am his mother, and I may be too much prejudiced in his favor to be a fair judge," smiled the matron.

"No, you are not. He *is* very handsome," repeated

Eldiva. And then she startled Ruth Dunn by demanding, abruptly: "Did you ever see Mr. Daw—the son of Lord John?"

"Yes, my dear, I have," replied the elder woman, staring at the speaker.

"Did you ever notice a likeness between him and your son?"

"Yes, my dear. And now let me beg your pardon for forgetting that likness when I showed you that sketch. If I had remembered it—as I should have done—I would not have called your attention to that. You will forgive my thoughtlessness?" said Ruth, gravely:

"There is nothing whatever to forgive, dear friend. I am glad to have seen this picture, for many reasons. But, tell me, is the likeness as strong as this picture would indicate? for this might have been taken for—the other one," said Eldiva.

"Yes, my dear, quite as strong; the two are counterparts of each other," replied Ruth.

"And does this remarkable likeness extend to voice, glance, gesture—all that makes individuality?"

"All—everything! You would never be able to tell one from the other except by some prearranged difference in dress."

"Then they would seem to be of near kin to each other. *Are they so?*" demanded the younger lady, looking full into the face of the elder.

Ruth Dunn was taken by surprise, and thrown into a momentary confusion. She did not wish to divulge family secrets at this point of time, even to her beloved young friend. She recovered herself, however, and answered evasively:

"Akin? Why, I do not believe that they ever met, or

ever so much as heard of each other's existence until Roderick became Lord John's secretary."

"Ah! then it may be one of those strange accidents of resemblance that we sometimes hear and read of between persons who are nothing at all to each other," said Eldiva, seeing that Ruth Dunn was either ignorant of any tie between the counterparts, or desirous of concealing it, if any such existed.

And she returned the sketch to Ruth, saying again:

"He is very handsome."

"And now, my dear," said the widow, as she received the little picture, and replaced it in the japan box, "I have a confession to make to you."

Eldiva looked up uneasily. What was she about to hear? Anything to the discredit of this woman, whom she had learned to love as a mother? She hoped not.

"What would you think, my dear, if I should tell you that I have something of yours in my possession that I have kept from you for years? Something of yours that was given me to be returned to you years ago, before you ever came to this house—before we ever knew each other? Say, what would you think, Eldiva?"

The young lady reflected for a few moments and then replied:

"I should think that you had put it away with the intention of returning it to me at the first convenient season, and had then forgotten all about it."

"Bless your confiding heart, my child, that is just what happened! *This* was found by my son Roderick, who intrusted it to me to be returned to its owner," said Ruth Dunn, handing the gossamer cobweb to Eldiva, who took it with a smile, looked at it carelessly, and then—let it fall from her fingers as the pallor of horror

crept over her face on recognizing the lace handkerchief she had lost on that fatal wedding night.

"Oh, Heaven of heavens!—where—where——" she gasped, through pallid lips.

"Where did Roderick find it, do you mean? Why, on the front stairs of the Wolf's Head Tavern, my dear! I hope I have done no new harm, now!" exclaimed Ruth Dunn, in terror and amazement at the effect of her action.

"Oh, my heart! my heart! Was *he*—Roderick Dunn—your son—there—at the Wolf's Head—that night?" breathed Eldiva, on the very verge of swooning.

"What night, dear girl? The night after your marriage, do you mean?" questioned the alarmed and distressed woman.

"Yes, yes!" sighed Eldiva, as if her soul left her body in that sigh.

"He was there, my dear child, and he found your handkerchief on the stairs and he tried to follow and give it to you, but failed to find you, I suppose, for, at any rate, he brought it home with him and left it with me to be returned to you. Oh, Eldiva, my dear, have I hurt you again? Ah, how unlucky I am! I am very sorry, my child. I never meant to hurt you!" pleaded Ruth Dunn.

"I know it! Oh, I know it! You are kindness itself! But do not speak to me just now. Do not mind me—I—think I will go to bed. There!—don't distress your tender heart about me. Good-night, dear friend," said Eldiva, putting her arms around Ruth's neck and kissing her fondly before she left the room.

When Eldiva had closed the door behind her, Ruth Dunn dropped her head upon her hands and fell into thought. Certain terrible suspicions that had troubled

her mind years ago, but that had been lulled to sleep, were re-awakened by her reflections on the scene which had just passed.

Why had Eldiva been so greatly agitated at sight of Roderick Dunn's picture? Why had her agitation been increased almost to hysteria or syncope at sight of that little lace trifle? What mystery was this?

Ruth Dunn could form no theory.

She locked her japanned box, pushed it to its place on that table of which it was the chief ornament, and then, as the clock had struck eleven, she retired to bed, where she could not sleep for speculating on the enigma that occupied her mind.

In the meantime, Eldiva reached her own chamber, which was now chilly, because the open wood-fire had nearly gone out. She did not replenish it from the basket of wood in the chimney corner, but dropped down in the rocking-chair, covered her face with her hands, and broke into a storm of tears and sobs, and wept long and violently.

Not until the paroxysm had exhausted itself and left her in a calmer, though a weaker, state, could she reflect clearly on all that she had learned that night—on all that had passed, and all that was to come.

That Roderick Dunn, the son of Ruth, was the man who bore that fatal likeness to her late husband, Mr. John Daw—was the man who found that little lace toy on the stairs of the Wolf's Head Tavern on her wedding night and went to put it in her hands—was the man who —oh, woe! woe! If Roderick Dunn, being the unknown man, were coming back to Washington, she, Eldiva, must leave the city and bury herself in the wilds of St. Mary's, or, anywhere—anywhere out of his sight and hearing!

She did not go to bed, but spent the night alternately pacing up and down the floor or crouching in her rocking-chair, tortured equally by memory and by anticipation.

Toward morning fatigue overcame her as she walked, so, throwing a large shawl around her shoulders, she dropped once more into her chair, not to sleep, but simply to rest, and then sleep came to her unbidden and "sealed down her eyelids" in forgetfulness of all her cares.

So she slept soundly for several hours.

The merry voices and pattering footsteps of the children in their dormitories overhead were the first sounds that awakened her in the morning.

She opened her eyes and looked around. The sun was glancing brightly through the slats of her east window shutter. All was cheerful in the morning. Why, then, this weight upon her heart? What had happened? she asked herself. Then came recollection with a rush.

Roderick Dunn!

That name now stood for all the nameless woe and horror and desperation of her past life! for all the grief, terror and desolation of her future years.

"Diva, dear!"

The voice stole like a strain of sweet music into the whirlwind of her thoughts; fell like oil on the tossing waves of her emotions.

She looked around and saw Nerissa sitting up in bed.

"Diva, dear, why—you have been sitting up all night!" said the girl.

"Yes, darling," admitted the lady.

"But why?"

"I fell asleep in the chair, Nea, and slept until I was

awakened by the children overhead," explained Eldiva, telling only part of the truth.

"I never heard of such a thing!" declared Nea, as she slipped out of bed and went straight to the fireplace to rake the dying embers together and heap them with waste paper and split wood from the basket, like a practical little creature as she was.

"The children have risen earlier than usual, for the distribution of presents is to be made before breakfast this morning, so we must hurry, Nerissa," said Eldiva, forcing herself to speak cheerfully.

"Oh, I have learned to dress quickly at the academy. It would take *years* of fashionable life—if I ever should get into fashionable life, which is highly improbable—to unlearn that lesson," laughed Nea.

And in fact she was washed and dressed for the day in about fifteen minutes.

They heard the children coming downstairs hilariously, not to say uproariously.

As soon as they had all passed by and descended to the ground floor, Eldiva and Nerissa, who were quite ready, followed them down.

They found the children already in their seats in the school-room.

They all arose to receive their teacher, and stood up until she had taken her place at her desk on the platform.

Beside her sat Nerissa Lovel, and before them were piled up the Christmas presents.

Mrs. Dunn sat, for the time being, near the teacher, who now signed for the children to resume their seats, while she opened the Bible to begin the morning services by reading the lesson for the day. The chapter in

the New Testament was followed by prayers, and the services were concluded with a hymn.

The last notes were still vibrating on the air when Lancelot Roslyn entered the school-room and quietly dropped into a seat near the door.

After the doxology he passed up the middle aisle between the seats, smiling a mute good-morning to the children on his right and left as he passed until he reached the platform, where he shook hands cordially with the matron, the teacher and the young lady guest.

Then he took his seat beside Eldiva, and the distributing of the presents commenced, and progressed very much in the same manner in which it had been conducted three years before and every year since.

Some changes had taken place in the meantime. A few of the elder girls had grown up and had been placed out at trades. The little ones had grown bigger and now preferred ribbons, and other little ones had been admitted to the asylum, who could be made happy only by dolls.

When the distribution was completed, and the children dismissed to their breakfast, Lance told Eldiva that he had engaged a comfortable sleigh to be at the door by ten o'clock, and would be very happy if she, Nerissa, and Mrs. Dunn would go with him for a long sleigh ride.

Eldiva and Nerissa accepted the invitation; but Mrs. Dunn declined it, pleading her duties at the asylum as her excuse.

After the children of the institute had finished their breakfast, Lance joined the ladies at their morning meal in their own parlor.

At ten o'clock the sleigh was at the door, and Lance, Eldiva and Nerissa started for their long drive.

They crossed the Anacostia River, by the Navy Yard Bridge, and drove out on the Port Tobacco Road as far as the old Teebee Tavern in the Forest of Prince George's.

Here, for a change, they stopped and dined, returning homeward in the afternoon, and reaching the asylum at nightfall.

The merry children, tired of play, were now in bed.

Lance took tea with his friends and then returned to his hotel.

CHAPTER XV

REVELATIONS

As New Year's Day would come on Sunday and be celebrated on Monday, the Board of Managers of the Orphan Asylum had given directions that the Christmas holidays should last until the Tuesday after New Year, when the school should be re-opened.

In the meantime the teacher and pupils had plenty of leisure, which the latter enjoyed, but not the former.

Eldiva's health and spirits seemed suddenly to have given way. She was pale and silent. Mrs. Dunn complained that the teacher ate next to nothing at meal times. Nerissa, had she been less sound a sleeper, might have told of the wakeful and restless nights of her bedfellow. Lance noticed the change in his cousin and took an early opportunity of questioning his betrothed. One morning when he had called early and was received alone in the parlor by the young lady, after the usual affectionate greetings and some little strictly personal conversation, Lance suddenly inquired:

"Nea, dearest, what is the matter with Eldiva? I never saw any one so changed in all my life!"

"I don't know, Lance; but I *suspect* it is because Lord John and Mr. Daw are coming home. You know how strange their mutual relations are," whispered Nea.

"'Strange' indeed! I should think so! Married for love nine years ago against the opposition of all their friends—for you know his lordship was bitterly opposed to the match for worldly reasons, and her relatives equally unwilling for it, on moral principles, and yet those lovers bore down all opposition before them, actually *conquered* the consent of their reluctant relatives, married with *éclat,* started on their wedding journey, got as far as the Wolf's Head, and that night were hurled asunder by some unexplained cause, the bridegroom rushing off in one direction and the bride in another, to the consternation of their friends and the scandal of the community."

"But they were afterward reconciled," said Nea, deprecatingly.

"Yes, and then more mystery, or insanity! They were reconciled on his deathbed, or his supposed deathbed; and afterward, when his supposed death was proved to be only apparent death, and he was resuscitated and restored to life and health, hey! presto! change! and, 'as before!' bride and groom utterly estranged."

"Yes, and now you can understand how his return to the city should disturb her," sighed Nea.

"I can't understand anything about it, my darling! Loves her to madness till he marries her; casts her off on her bridal day or night; forgives her, dying; repudiates her, living; no, I cannot understand it."

"There is another mystery! You know she always

used to go on Christmas Eve, or Christmas morning, to put wreaths of immortelles on the old keeper's grave in the Congress Burying Ground," said Nea.

"Yes, I know."

"Well, she went this year on Christmas Eve, and not only on that day, but on every day since has she visited the place."

"That *is* strange! What interest can that grave have for her?"

"I have not the slightest idea," replied Nea.

"Have you ever questioned her?"

"Yes; but she gave me no satisfaction. She only gently requested me not to repeat my questions."

"Have you inquired what troubles her now?"

"Yes, and she was too truthful to answer 'Nothing' as many might have done; because there certainly was *something;* but she looked at me gravely and sweetly and said:

" 'Do not distress yourself about me, dear little Nea; and do not notice my moods in *any* manner.'

"Then, Lance, I knew I must be silent on that subject to *her;* and whatever I feel or think, I must not express either thoughts or feelings on this matter to her."

"I wonder if she would go with us this evening to the theatre to see the new star, Clara Fisher, who is to play *Beatrice* in "Much Ado About Nothing.' "

"Of course, she will go with us anywhere, for she does not nurse her trouble, but tries to throw it off," Nea explained.

Then the thoughts of the young lovers wandered away from Eldiva and her mysteries; and they began to talk of their future.

"I *think* I shall be ordered to the Mediterranean, Nerissa. I am working for that service rather than for

a cruise in the Pacific; and Commodore Yorke is helping me all he can with the Secretary. And, Nea, dearest, I want to call you my own, my wife, before I sail, so that you may follow me in a packet ship and rejoin me in whatever port we may be bound to. You consent to this, Nea, dearest?" he whispered, with his arm about the girl's round, slender waist.

"Wait until Aunt and Uncle Wells come, Lance, dear. They will be here soon," she shyly answered.

While they were talking Eldiva opened the door and glided in.

Lance met her with cordial affection.

The invitation to the theatre was given and accepted.

And when evening came the party of three went to see the new star. But though Lance and Nerissa enjoyed the comedy with all the zest of youth and good spirits, Eldiva was grave and preoccupied. She was anxious to resign her situation at the asylum and to escape into the country before Lord John Daw and his party should reach the city. But, unfortunately for her, she could not send in her resignation before there should be a meeting of the Board of Managers, half of whom were at this season absent on visits to the old country homesteads, where Christmas was being celebrated after the fashion of the "good old times;" so there would be no meeting of the board for a month to come. Nor could she run away from her post of duty like a recreant merely because to go would be more convenient and agreeable to her than to stay. She must remain until she could honorably retire.

But what in the meantime should she do if Roderick Dunn should reach Washington and come to visit his mother at the asylum before she should be free to leave? Certainly, if he should only come to call she could keep

her own room during his stay. But if he should come frequently to dinner or to tea, how should she manage always to avoid him, or how explain such avoidance to his mother without taking that mother into her own confidence and telling her what great reason she had for shunning her son—a communication that Eldiva could never have brought herself to make—that she would have died rather than have made?

What, then, should be her course?

This was the problem that occupied her thoughts as she was seated in her place, apparently watching the sparkling play of grace, wit and humor on the stage, which continually excited the applause and laughter of her two companions, and indeed of the whole audience.

She tried to rouse herself from her reverie, to break away from her troublesome problem, to join the merriment around her, but in vain; the attraction of her dark enigma was too strong.

When the curtain fell upon the final scene of the comedy, and the young actress, amid deafening applause, was called before the audience and greeted by a shower of bouquets, nothing could exceed the sympathetic delight of Nerissa and Lance, who continued to gaze with admiration upon the beautiful vision until she courtesied and finally withdrew.

Then, after a final round of applause, the audience began to disperse.

Lance picked up Eldiva's India shawl and wrapped it around her closely, for, seeing how deadly pale she was, he thought that she was cold.

Nea, in her Chinchilla hat, and boa, and muff, looked rosy and warm enough.

They left the theatre and walked briskly back to the asylum, where thoughtful Ruth Dunn had a glowing

fire and a hot pot of chocolate waiting for them; not to have saved them all from pleurisy or rheumatism would Ruth have provided a pitcher of hot punch or mulled wine; but the chocolate served a much better purpose.

The young party were just cold and tired enough to enjoy their seats around the blazing fire and the warm, aromatic beverage with which their cups were soon filled.

"There has been a message for you, my dears," said the matron, addressing the two young ladies, as she handed them the steaming cups.

"Ah! from whom?" eagerly demanded Nea, while Eldiva's heart seemed to stop in its beatings—for every new event frightened her now.

"From your Uncle and Aunt Wells, my dears. You were expecting them, I think."

"Oh, yes! Have they arrived!" eagerly demanded Eldiva, quickly recovering herself when she heard the nature of the message.

"Yes, dear, they reached the city this evening and put up at the Indian Queen Tavern, and immediately sent their man-servant Gad with a verbal message announcing their safe arrival and their wish to see you both at the tavern as early as you can make it convenient to-morrow morning."

"Oh, we will go immediately after breakfast!" said Nerissa, impetuously.

"I will call here early to escort you, then," added Lance, as he arose and bade them all good-night.

Half an hour later every one was in bed, and all was quiet about the asylum, except the troubled heart and sleepless mind of Eldiva.

Directly after breakfast the next morning Lance came

to the house to escort Eldiva and Nerissa to call on Mr. and Mrs. Wells at the Indian Queen Hotel.

They found the gay and festive old couple in their private parlor that overlooked the avenue.

They were both looking finely, with their portly forms, fresh complexions and silvery white hair, which the old gentleman still wore parted in the middle and flowing down each side his clean-shaven, florid face, and which the old lady wore dressed high above her forehead and surmounted by a pretty, bright cap.

Their costumes were as gay as themselves. Uncle Jubal wore a bright blue cloth cut-away coat, with bright brass buttons, a yellow brocade vest, yellow doeskin short breeches, yellow silk stockings, and low shoes with great brass buckles.

Aunt Joyce wore a much beruffled and beflowered chintz dressing-gown, of as many hues as Joseph's coat of many colors, over a white dimity skirt, and embroidered flesh-colored silk hose, and high-heeled slippers with silver buckles.

They were seated at a table before the fire, both engaged in looking over the morning papers.

As the visitors were shown into the room, Uncle Jubal, with the agility of eighteen instead of the infirmity of eighty-one, sprang up to meet them with both hands held out. As the kindly old gentleman had not "taken pen in hand to avail himself of the opportunity" —of being formal and tedious, he could afford to be natural and delightful as he was.

"How do you do, my dear girls?" he cordially exclaimed, with a hearty grasp of the hand for each, and then as hearty a kiss. "And you, Lance, dear boy! What a fine fellow you have grown?—six feet tall, if an inch, and broad-shouldered in proportion! Go speak

to your aunt, young people! You must not expect *her* to leave her chair for *you,* you know!" he exclaimed, as he continued to shake hands all around once more.

"We are so glad to see you, dear Uncle Jubal!" said Nerissa.

"So happy to find you so well, uncle!" added Eldiva.

"Never saw you look so splendidly in all my life before, sir!" put in Lance.

"Thank you, young ones! Yes, I feel pretty well and jolly!" exclaimed the old gentleman, gayly accepting the compliments. "And so does your aunt. There! go pay your respects to her!" he added to Lance, for the two girls had already flown to Aunt Joyce and were covering her with caresses.

"And you will stay and spend the day and dine with us," said the genial old lady, when all these greetings had been got through with and they were all seated near the table and the fire.

"But you were going out, perhaps?" suggested Eldiva.

"Oh, no, not to-day. We shall stay in the house to-day," replied Aunt Joyce.

"Oh, yes, I forgot! You must be tired after your long journey," said Eldiva.

"'Tired?'" echoed Aunt Joyce, her very tone promptly repudiating the degrading imputation—"'*tired?*' Now, my dear, when did you ever hear *me* complain of being tired? I am not the least bit tired. We came up from St. Inigoes yesterday in the large sleigh, drawn by four strong draught horses; and I tell you, my loves, we just flew over the highways! And we both feel as fresh this morning as we did yesterday morning before we started!"

"More so, Joyce, my dear! much more so! The

change has already done us so much good!" chimed in Uncle Jubal. Then turning to Eldiva and Nerissa, he explained—"The reason why we don't care to go out to-day is because there is really nothing to see. Congress —both Houses of Congress—and also the Supreme Court, have all adjourned until after the holidays are over, so it is of no use to go to the Capitol—nothing to see there! And the President don't receive before New Year's Day, so there is no use to go there! And it's no use to go anywhere! That is one reason why we stay home to-day! And another reason is that we want to have a good, long visit with you young folks, whom we have not had the pleasure of seeing for a year," concluded Uncle Jubal.

"And now you will stop and spend the whole day with us, and maybe to-night your Uncle Jubal will take us all to the Washington Theatre to see this new actress, Miss Clara Fisher! There, now, go into my bedroom and take off your bonnets and furs, you two girls! And Lance, boy, you give your hat and cloak to Gad there. He will take them away and hang them up," said the old lady, settling the whole question by taking it for granted that her young relatives would stay to dinner and spend the day, as, indeed, they concluded to do without further parley.

"I saw in the *Intelligencer* of this morning that Lord John Daw and his party are expected to be in Washington from their foreign tour early in the new year," said Mr. Wells, taking up the journal alluded to after the young ladies had returned to the parlor, and all the little company were re-assembled at the fireside.

"However could that have got into the paper?" inquired Lance, raising his eyebrows.

"From Daly, his lordship's agent, I presume. At

least, the paragraph says that Mr. Richard Daly, his lordship's land steward, has received a letter from his lordship instructing him to put the mansion house at The Hill in perfect readiness for the reception of his lordship and party," said Mr. Wells.

"Ah, yes! The news came from Daly, then, of course," said Lance.

"Had *you* heard of it before? I thought from your manner of speaking that you *had,* perhaps?" inquired Mr. Wells.

"Well, yes," laughed Lance.

"And, pray, how did *you* get the news of it, if one may ask?" questioned Uncle Jubal.

"Why, a friend of mine—Mrs. Dunn, the matron of the Girls' Orphan Asylum—received a letter from her son Roderick, who is my lord's secretary, and this letter announced their return in January."

"Then there is no doubt of the fact, of course," concluded Uncle Jubal. And suddenly recollecting that this subject could not be an agreeable one to his niece, Eldiva, considering the terms she was on with the house of Daw, he changed it abruptly by saying:

"And now, young people, tell me something about yourselves. Lance, what are your prospects, my dear boy? On leave, are you?"

"Yes, Uncle."

"For how long?"

"Three months—till the 20th of March."

"Humph! And then, Lance, where do you go? Not on home service again, of course?"

"No, sir; I expect to be ordered to the Mediterranean," said the young lieutenant.

"Ah! Then you are fortunate. If you must be or-

dered somewhere, the Mediterranean is the most desirable place. When do you expect to sail?"

"About the first of April."

"Ah! And when do you expect to be promoted?"

"I have just been promoted, sir."

"Ah! indeed! I congratulate you, Lieutenant Roslyn! And now when do you expect to be married, eh?"

This question was put jocosely, without any thought of a serious reply to it, so the old gentleman was rather taken aback when the young lieutenant gravely replied:

"Very soon, my dear uncle, if you please."

"Eh, what! You *don't* mean it, Lance?"

"Yes, sir, with all my heart I mean it!"

"Dear me! Bless my soul! And who is the fair lady, if your old uncle may inquire?"

Lance arose and took the hand of Nerissa and led her, blushing like a rose, before the old gentleman.

"Nerissa has blessed me so, dear uncle."

"Eh! what! what! Nea! Bless my soul! Bless my soul!" said the old gentleman.

"I always *knew* that would be a match!" laughed the old lady.

"Bless—my—soul!" repeated Uncle Jubal, in a tone that caused Nerissa to change color and Lance to say, in an aggrieved tone:

"I hope you see no objection, Uncle Wells?"

"I? Lor', no! That is—if it's a love match," said Uncle Jubal, looking with pretended shrewdness at the young man, who blushed, but did not speak.

"*Is* it a love match—a *true* love match, now?" demanded Uncle Jubal.

"Sir, Nerissa is my nearest and dearest. I love her better than all the world! I do not know the time when

I did not love her better than myself," earnestly replied the young man.

"Well, I am glad you told me, anyhow," chuckled Mr. Wells.

"Did you really need to be told, sir?" inquired Lance, in an aggrieved tone.

"Well—yes—it is a satisfaction to know that this is a real, good, old-fashioned love match, else I might have suspected it, with very good grounds, to be a mercenary one," still chuckled the old man.

"MERCENARY?" indignantly exclaimed Lance.

"Mercenary?" doubtfully questioned Eldiva.

"Yes; a suspicious person might have thought so," persisted Mr. Wells.

"But, why, in the name of Heaven?" demanded Lance.

"Why, just because the young lady whose hand you have won is now the richest heiress in this city.

CHAPTER XVI

A HAPPY DAY

"NERISSA LOVEL is the richest heiress in the city," repeated Mr. Jubal Wells.

Eldiva smiled, Nerissa laughed, Lance roared.

They did this all in compliment to Mr. Wells, for they thought the "news" was one of his jokes—not a very brilliant one, to be sure, but, all the same, they were in duty bound to laugh at Uncle Jubal's jokes.

"You'll not break with me now that you are a wealthy young lady, will you, Nea?" jocosely inquired Lance.

"Oh, Lancelot!" pleaded Nerissa.

"I shall come to you for a generous donation to the Orphan Asylum, Nea," said Eldiva.

"Oh, Diva!" pleaded Nerissa.

"Miss Lovel will not commit herself by any promises," remarked Lance with pretended gravity.

"I see that she will not," assented Eldiva, with affected displeasure.

"Oh, Lancelot! Oh, Diva! It is cruel of you to tease me so when you *know* that Uncle Jubal is making fun of me!" said Nerissa, almost ready to weep. "I wish I *was* rich! *Oh,* how I *do* wish I was rich! Then I would give everything they want to every one I love, and ever so much to the Orphan Asylum! But you know that I am as poor as—as—'as a church mouse,'" concluded Nerissa, falling back upon the household proverb.

"Poor!" exclaimed Mr. Jubal Wells, staring at the girl over the tops of his gold-rimmed spectacles.

"Yes, Uncle Jubal. Didn't you know it? Why, it took all the little personal property that my dear mother left behind her to pay the debts, and I was left without a penny. Didn't you know that? Lance and Diva know it, for they have taken care of me and paid my school bills. I thought you knew that," added the grieved girl.

"Don't tease her any more, Uncle Jubal. She is a sensitive little being, and cannot stand, nor *under*stand, our rude jokes," said the lieutenant, with some asperity. Then turning to the young girl, he took her hand and whispered:

"Nea, love, I beg your pardon for my share in this foolish jesting."

"'Jesting!'" echoed Uncle Jubal, who had over-

heard the whispered words. "*Who* is jesting? *I* am not, so help me Heaven! I never was in more solemn and joyous earnest in all the days of my life!"

Impressed by the gravity of the old gentleman's words and manner, his young friends all turned toward him with looks that mutely asked the question which only Lance Roslyn put into plain words:

"What, then, do you mean, my dear uncle, by stating that Nea is the richest heiress in the city?"

"I mean to state a *fact,* my dear nephew. I mean to state that Nerissa Lovel, as the next of kin to the late Mordaunt Lovel, who died intestate seven years ago last March, is sole heiress of Brightwater Park, one of the finest estates in the county of Sussex in England, with a rent roll of forty thousand pounds a year! Is that plain English? Does *that* sound like a joke?" demanded the old gentleman.

"That is very plain English, and it sounds—prodigiously like a joke!" replied the astonished lieutenant.

"It *cannot* be possible!" murmured Nerissa, too deeply moved to speak above her breath; for, not the most selfish and avaricious miser had ever coveted the possession of wealth for his own sake more ardently than the unselfish and generous young girl longed for it for the sake of others—for the comfort of comforting, for the delight of delighting, all whom she could help or please.

And now the paradise she longed for seemed possible!

No wonder she listened with suspended breath to hear of it.

"Uncle," said Eldiva, "where did you get your information? Are you quite sure that it is reliable? All this seems very improbable, you know. Heaven grant that it may be true, for Nea's sake!"

"I got my information from perfectly authentic sources, Mrs. John Daw," replied the old gentleman, slightly nettled that his own judgment should be called in question by his niece, "and that information is perfectly reliable, madam. So, strange and improbable as you consider it, you may now thank Heaven for Nea's sake."

"I beg your pardon, my dear uncle; the wisest men may be sometimes imposed upon by false reports, and I simply feared that such might have been the case with you in regard to this rich inheritance of Nerissa's," said Eldiva.

"Set your heart at rest, my dear; it is all right, all right," replied Uncle Jubal, his good humor quite restored.

Lance Roslyn, who had been a silent and thoughtful listener to this colloquy, now spoke for the first time:

"Mordaunt Lovel, of Brightwater Park, from whom Nea inherits this estate, has been dead, you say, for more than seven years——"

"Yes, seven years last March!—Nearly eight years now!" interrupted Mr. Wells.

"Then how is it that Nea's inheritance has never been heard of until now, uncle?"

"Because Neil Carnes, who is the next heir after Nea, being descended from a lower branch of the family, as she is from the upper, has contrived to make good his bad claim, and has usurped her property for the last six years!" Mr. Wells explained.

"*That* was the reason, then, why he pretended he was going to take me to Europe, and instead of doing so, lured me into the mountains of Virginia and tried to lose me there!" said Nerissa, with half-suppressed vehemence.

"Yes, that was undoubtedly the reason," assented the old gentleman.

"And for his deceiving us all and pretending to be in Paris with Nerissa when he was really in England and she in the mountain wildernesses of Virginia, lost to the knowledge of all her friends."

"Yes," assented Mr. Wells.

"Uncle Jubal, from whom did you gain this intelligence in regard to Neil Carnes' usurpation of Nea's inheritance?" demanded Lance.

"From the fountain-head, my dear boy! From Neil Carnes himself," said Mr. Wells.

"'From Neil Carnes himself!'" echoed Lance and Eldiva, simultaneously.

"Yes, my dears, from him, himself."

"Carnes told you the tale of his own dishonor!" exclaimed Lance Roslyn, in amazement.

"Yes, my boy, he told it to me, or rather wrote it to me, which amounts to much more than the same thing," gravely replied the old gentleman.

"Was it—a death-bed confession? Has he passed away?" Eldiva inquired, breathing the question in an awe-struck whisper.

"Not a bit of it! He is alive and likely to live! He is in as healthy a state of body as he ever was before! and in a much healthier state of mind than he ever enjoyed, as may be seen by his willingness to resign his usurped estate to the rightful heiress."

"I cannot understand it," said Lance, reflectively.

"Nor I!" added Eldiva.

Nea said nothing, but *looked* the most thoughtful of the three.

"Oh, yes! You could understand it well enough if the sinner had been thrown from his horse and received

a fatal injury, or been exposed to contagion and caught a deadly fever, and so been brought face to face with death and judgment, for you young people live in externals and feel and reason from externals; but you cannot understand how a man may reap all the material profits of his sin, and yet lose his mental peace, and suffer so from the loss that to regain his peace he may be willing to renounce his profits."

"No, for we have had no personal experience of the sort," said Lance, quickly.

"My young friend, you may learn from observation, as well as from experience!" replied Uncle Jubal.

"And is the case you cited that of Neil Carnes, sir?" gravely inquired Eldiva.

"Yes, my dear, it is. The conscience of the man has driven him to make confession and restitution. No fear of death or judgment constrains him, for he is in the prime of life and health. He succeeded perfectly in all his plans, in suppressing the truth in regard to the existence of Nerissa Lovel, the rightful heiress, and in usurping her estate; but no sooner did he feel secure in its possession than he grew wretched in his security. He was not addicted to any vices, as we know, or he might have drowned conscience in his desperation; but fortunately for him, as for his wronged niece, he could not do this. He struggled with his conscience for six years, during which he has unlawfully held Nerissa's estate, and finally he has written to me, told me the whole story of his abduction of Nea and his usurpation of her estate; of his repentance and desire to make atonement, and of his wish that I should seek out the injured girl in her exile at Greenmont, Virginia.

"He does not know, then, that Nerissa has been rescued and restored to her friends, here?" said Lance.

"He knows but little about her since he left her with a family of the name of Roach in Greenmont. His great anxiety now is that Nea may be found alive and well, and in a condition to enjoy her estate. He suggests that her education may have been neglected, but that, if all else be right with her, and her eyesight be recovered, she may be put to school for two years, as she is now but eighteen."

"Ah! he does not know that her sight has been restored these five years past, and that she has graduated with honors from her academy after a three years' course of study," said Eldiva.

"I repeat that he knows but little about her since he left her in the mountains of Virginia," said Mr. Wells.

"You have written to him, Uncle Jubal? You have told him good news of me?" said Nerissa.

"Yes, my dear, of course. But he has not yet had time to receive my letter," replied the old gentleman.

"Nerissa, give me your hand, love. Now, I do, in all sincerity, congratulate you on your good fortune," said Eldiva, drawing the young heiress to her side and kissing her fondly.

"I can scarcely believe this to be all real yet, Diva; but if it *should* be so, I will endow the Orphan Asylum. Oh! what a happiness it would be to do that and other things!" exclaimed the girl.

"And now, young people, do you know what I advise?" inquired Mr. Wells.

"No, Uncle Jubal. What is it?" inquired Lance.

"It is this—but first, you must know that it is necessary for Nerissa Lovel to go to England," said Mr. Wells.

"I—yes, I suppose it is, since you mention it; but I

had not thought of it before," Lance admitted, regretfully.

"And it is necessary that some one should go with her."

"Yes, I presume so; of course."

"Some proper male escort."

"Y-e-s," assented Lance, slowly.

"Now, then, this is what I advise for the best—that as you and Nerissa are engaged, you marry at once and embark for England."

"Oh, Uncle Jubal! if I might be so happy!" exclaimed the young lieutenant, with his countenance radiant of joy.

"Well, there is nothing to hinder you, my boy!"

"If I could *only* get an extension of leave!"

"'An extension of leave,' indeed! Don't even ask for it. Resign your commission in the Navy. Now is a time of profound peace when you may resign with honor. You don't want your post, and many a young man does want it. Leave it for some young fellow who needs it more than you do, and devote yourself to some one who needs *you* more than the Navy does—to little Nea here. Marry her. Take her to England. Settle down, both of you, at Brightwater Park, and trust me, you will find work enough in the proper management of that large estate to occupy all the time and energy you have at command, even though you may have the help of an experienced bailiff. And, besides, young gentleman, as Nerissa Lovel's oldest relative and natural guardian, I shall oppose your marriage with her unless you resign from the Navy. I am not going to have the young wife either left alone with a lot of strangers in England, or dragged all over the navigable globe after a sea-faring husband, you understand."

"Nea! Nea! Nearest and Dearest! I am giddy, giddy with all this sudden happiness. What do you say? Speak, love, speak," eagerly whispered Lance.

"Listen to Uncle Jubal, Lance, dear: listen to Uncle Jubal. He is older and wiser than we are, and he knows what is best," shyly whispered the maiden in reply.

"Then we will take his advice, Nea, darling."

"Yes, Lance."

"Bless you, Nea."

"And there is no time to be lost," said Mrs. Joyce Wells, speaking for the first time. "We must see at once to having Nea's outfit prepared for the voyage. We may as well go up to Stetinius' and see what new goods he has got in, and call and see if we can get Catharine Johnson or Nancy Greenwell in here to sew; and it would be well if we could engage both of them, for there will be so much for them to do."

"There is just like your Aunt Joyce; she always wants to make reality more real by going straight to work on something practical at once," explained Uncle Jubal, with a proud and affectionate glance toward his happy old helpmate.

"Then, after an early dinner, we will go out. Jubal, my dear, you will see that the sleigh is cleaned and brought around, and foot-stoves put in it. And, girls, one of you get a pencil and piece of paper and let us think of what will be wanted and put it down in a list. It will save a great deal of time and trouble in the shopping."

All was therefore arranged according to Uncle Jubal and Aunt Joyce's advice.

After an early dinner taken in their private parlor, the three ladies, leaving the two gentlemen *tête-à-tête* by the fire-side, went in the sleigh, driven by Gad, to do the

immense amount of shopping they deemed necessary to the double requirements of a marriage and a long sea-voyage. Having accomplished as much as they could manage in that department, they hunted up the dress-maker and the seamstress, succeeded in engaging them both to come on the following Tuesday, and then they returned to an early tea, which, like their dinner, they took in their own apartment where they found Uncle Jubal and Lance Roslyn still lounging in arm-chairs at opposite chimney corners, and engaged in talking over the present family situation.

At the tea-table, a trifling matter that had been forgotten in the early part of the day's discussion was now brought up by Aunt Joyce.

"You say, Jubal, that the marriage must take place immediately," she said, suspending her tea-cup on its way to her lips and looking over the tops of her spectacles.

"Yes, of course, I do, for they must be safe across the ocean before the equinoctial storms come on in the latter part of March, and of course they must be married before they sail; so they must be married immediately," replied the old match-maker.

"Hum! 'Immediately!' That cannot be taken literally, of course! They cannot well be married this minute, this hour, or even this day. Immediately means within a few weeks, I reckon."

"It means, Joyce, my dear, by the middle of January at farthest."

"And this is the 31st of December! Short notice! but if the young people see no objection I will make none," said Aunt Joyce.

The young people were quite willing to leave the whole matter to the old people so long as the latter

planned to advance their marriage, instead of retarding it.

The wedding day was finally fixed for Tuesday the 16th of January, and in the meantime passage was to be secured in the cabin of the *Flying Angel* packet which was to sail from Baltimore on the 20th, bound for Liverpool.

When all these points were satisfactorily arranged, as it was late, the three young ones bade their old friends good-night with a promise to meet them at church the next day, which was Sunday, the 1st of January, and also to go with them to the President's New Year's Reception on Monday.

And, my dearest Eldiva! after the marriage and departure of your cousins, Lance and Nea, you will think of our desire that you should leave the asylum and make your home with us," said the kindly old gentleman, as he shook Eldiva by the hand.

"Oh, yes, my dear girl! Make up your mind to return with us when we go home, and we will be sure to cheer you up and make you happy," added the amiable old lady.

"I thank you very much, Uncle Jubal and Aunt Joyce. I am about to resign my situation, and I shall be very glad to find my City of Refuge in your house," replied Eldiva, gratefully.

The sleigh was waiting for them at the door, with Gad on the driver's seat.

Lance put the two young ladies in their places, and having covered them up warmly in the soft, rich afghans with which the interior was lined, he took his place beside the coachman, who started his horses to the sound of merry bells, and they flew over the frozen snow

and under the moonlight sky, and in a very short time reached the asylum.

As the hour was so late, the young lieutenant declined his cousin's invitation to enter the house, and as soon as the door was opened by old Ambrose, he bade his companions good-night, and returned to the sleigh to be driven to his lodgings by Gad.

CHAPTER XVII

MARRIAGE BELLS

When Eldiva and Nerissa entered the parlor they found a roaring wood fire in the open chimney, and the customary kettle of chocolate simmering on the hearth, and three china cups on a little waiter on the table, the whole presided over by Mrs. Dunn, who sat in an arm-chair, resting after her day's duties.

"Just throw your bonnets and shawls on the table there, dears, and come near the fire. I thought you would be cold, so I have had a big log put on to keep it up," said Mrs. Dunn, cordially, as she arose and pushed back her chair to make more room for the young ladies.

"You are always so good to us, Ruth, dear," said Eldiva, as she and Nerissa drew their chairs up to the fire and put their feet on the fender.

Ruth Dunn smiled, took up the kettle of chocolate and filled the cups, and handed one to Eldiva and another to Nerissa, taking the third herself.

And there over the pot of chocolate Eldiva imparted the news of the day—the great news of Nea's rich inheritance and her near marriage.

Mrs. Dunn was filled with surprise and sympathy, and warmly congratulated the little bride-elect.

"And after New Year's, when the school duties are resumed here and will take up nearly all my time, Nea is to go to her aunt and uncle at the Indian Queen Tavern where she will remain under their protection until her marriage," added Eldiva.

Ruth Dunn repeated her congratulations, and then the trio finished their chocolate in silence.

"Now, confidence for confidence, my dears," said Ruth Dunn, as soon as she had washed and put away the china cups and the kettle, and had returned to her seat by the fire. "I have received another letter from my son. He writes that his patron, Lord John Daw, has been detained for a few days by business; but that all his party are quite well, and expect certainly to be in Washington before the end of January.

Eldiva's heart gave a bound of joy. Now, then, she would have time to give the managers warning and retire from the asylum before the arrival of Roderick Dunn should afford the chance of his meeting her. But in the midst of her own self-congratulation she felt a pang of pity for poor Ruth Dunn, who again, after so many repetitions, felt the sorrow of a hope deferred.

"This is a disappointment to you, Ruth, dear," she said.

"Yes, it is a disappointment on one hand, and a relief on the other; for now I shall have an opportunity of honorably withdrawing from my position here before my son's arrival," cheerfully replied Ruth.

Eldiva stared at the matron.

"Are you *also* going to leave the asylum?" inquired she.

"Yes, my dear; for there are reasons, strong reasons,

why I should do so before my son's arrival. Mrs. Radcliffe, the President of the Board of Managers, happened to be in the city to-day, and called at the asylum. I then advised her of my intention to send in my resignation to the management at their next meeting, and begged that she would immediately see to securing a successor."

"That must have surprised her as much as it has surprised me," said Eldiva.

"It did, indeed. And she sought by every argument to induce me to remain; but I assured her that nothing but absolute necessity compelled me to resign. But, my dear Eldiva, what did you mean by asking me, 'Are you *also* going to leave the asylum?' Surely, my dear, you do not contemplate resignation of your place here?"

"Yes, I do, Ruth. My letter of resignation will be laid before the board of managers at their next meeting. And the motive of my action is, like your own, one of absolute necessity. If Mrs. Radcliffe should be in town to-morrow, I shall call on her and inform her of my intention, so that she may advertise for my successor here," said Eldiva, rather sadly.

"Dear me! the board of lady managers will think the very foundation of the institution is crumbling if their 'very much esteemed matron and teacher'—as they term us in their report—should fall away from them at the same time! And the poor children!" said Ruth, with a sudden change of tone; "they will not only lose us, whom they love so dearly, but they will lose Nerissa's holiday visits and Lance's Christmas dolls and ribbons!"

"Oh! Mrs. Dunn," said Nea, earnestly, "they may miss *us,* but they shall not miss our holiday gifts. I will never forget the children—never! never! I mean to make a large donation to the asylum, and every Christ-

mas and every Easter send over gifts for them! That is the reason—*one* reason—why I am so *glad* to be rich."

"I know you will keep your promise, dear girl, though I shall not be here to see its fulfillment," replied Ruth Dunn.

"And now," said Eldiva, rising, "as it is after eleven o'clock, I think we had better cover up the fire and go to bed."

The teacher's advice was followed, and all the house was soon buried in darkness, silence and repose.

The next morning Mrs. Dunn undertook to marshal the orphans to their places in the church and to keep them in order there, leaving Eldiva to go with Nerissa and Lance to meet Uncle Jubal and Aunt Joyce at another place of worship, and to go afterward and spend the day with these relatives at their hotel.

Uncle Jubal and Aunt Joyce were conscientious observers of the Sabbath, who attended church twice every Sunday and who would countenance no discussion of worldly affairs or reading of worldly books or papers on that day, so there was no mention made of Nea's change of fortune or of her approaching marriage with Lance.

No, nor would Uncle Jubal ever allow his horses to be taken out on the Lord's day, except in cases of urgent necessity. So that when night came, Lance Roslyn had to escort his betrothed and her cousin home on foot.

The next day was a great day in Washington. It was the occasion of President Jackson's first New Year's levee, and from an early hour in the forenoon the streets and avenues leading toward the White House were thronged with foot passengers, horses and carriages, all wending thitherward.

Mr. and Mrs. Wells called in their coach for Eldiva

and Nerissa, who were waiting to accompany them to the great gathering.

Eldiva had overhauled her trousseau of nine years back and modernized dresses for herself and Nerissa, and now they appeared well arrayed.

Eldiva wore a rich black velvet pelisse, and black velvet hat with white marabout feathers, a white swan's-down boa and muff, and white kid gloves. This simple and severe costume of black and white, which must have been so trying to almost any other style of woman, was very becoming to the clear-skinned, dark-haired and dark-eyed little beauty.

Nerissa wore a rich crimson silk dress and a Chinchilla spencer and hat and white kid gloves, and looked, it is needless to say, very beautiful.

But the dress of the young people was nothing to the gorgeousness of the old folks.

Aunt Joyce wore a dress of white satin brocade embroidered in alternate groups of large silver or gold roses; over this she wore a cape of fine ermine, and her hands, covered with long kid gloves, were hidden in a large muff of the same costly fur. On her head, above the silver hair, which was dressed in large puffs around her forehead, she wore a Queen Caroline bonnet, an enormous edifice of white velvet, satin and lace, the flaring inside front of which was a rich parterre of white roses and the towering crown of which was a grove of white feathers, ribbon bows and loops. This costume was stunning, but true of the times.

As for Uncle Jubal. The costume of the last century had gone out with the period, yet Uncle Jubal, with a few more very old gentlemen of the day, still persisted in wearing it; and now Mr. Wells appeared in cocked hat, powdered hair, blue velvet cut-away coat, white

brocade satin vest, white buckskin short breeches, long white silk stockings and low shoes, with shining silver buckles.

He doffed his hat as he handed his two young relatives into the coach and seated them on the front cushions, while he took his own place beside his wife on the back ones, and he held it in his hand during the long drive up Pennsylvania Avenue to the White House.

Passing in at the gate, they found their coach in the rear of a long procession of carriages reaching from that spot to the distant door of the house. And other carriages were constantly coming up behind theirs.

It was fully an hour before the slow movement of this long line of vehicles before them allowed their coach to draw up before the portal of the Executive Mansion, where at length they alighted and entered behind a crowd who were pressing in toward the reception room, where stood, attended by his staff, the illustrious soldier and statesman whose memory is still fresh in the hearts of his countrymen; where stood also his beloved niece, the graceful and accomplished Mrs. Donelson, who did the honors of the White House during the administration of her widowed uncle.

Our party pressed forward, or rather *were* pressed on by those behind until they found themselves standing before the President.

Mr. Wells handed his card to the marshal in attendance, who read the name and presented the visitor to the President and Mrs. Donelson. Then Mr. Wells presented Mrs. Wells, Mrs. Daw and Miss Lovel. Bows and courtesies were ceremoniously but rather hastily exchanged, as the visitors were pressed forward by those behind, and pressed onward into the long East Room, where they found themselves in the midst of a brilliant

but rather mixed assembly of foreign ministers and ambassadors in their court costumes; officers of the Army and Navy, in their glittering uniforms; Senators and members of the House of Representatives, civil and municipal dignitaries, citizens and strangers, and crowds of ladies of all ages and styles, with more or less costly and elegant toilets.

A band of music was in full blast.

Mr. Wells, with his wife on his arm, promenaded slowly through the crowd, followed by Eldiva and Nerissa walking together, until they met Lieutenant Roslyn, who had paid his respects to the President earlier in the morning, at the hour when the officers of the army and navy were received, and he had been waiting for the arrival of his friends ever since.

They were greeted by him with great pleasure.

"I was feeling quite lost in this great crowd!" laughed Lance, as he drew Nerissa's arm within his own, leaving Eldiva to the escort of his brother officer, Lieutenant North, who now joined their party.

"This is quite as it should be!" said Uncle Jubal, with a sigh of satisfaction, as he led the way with his gay old wife. "We are all properly paired off now; but I assure you, young gentlemen, with all these young ladies under my sole charge, I was feeling quite like a three-tailed bashaw until you came to relieve me."

"Mind how you talk, Jubal, my dear," said Aunt Joyce in an admonishing tone.

He pressed her arm closer to his side, laughed softly and walked on in silence.

They finally drove back to the Indian Queen Tavern, where they kept Eldiva, Nerissa, and Lance to dinner.

In the afternoon the whole party, including Jubal and Aunt Joyce, went to the asylum to witness the magic

lantern show that the young lieutenant had prepared for the entertainment of the orphan children.

The exhibition and the feast that followed it both went off well, and wound up the Christmas holidays in a highly satisfactory manner to every one concerned.

The next day the school duties at the asylum were resumed; and Nerissa, leaving Eldiva at her post, went to the Indian Queen to live under the protection of her aunt and uncle until her marriage.

Lance Roslyn also changed his quarters from Fuller's, at the corner of Fifteenth Street and Pennsylvania Avenue, to the Indian Queen, to be under the same roof with his betrothed and her friends.

A few days later their party was augmented by the arrival of Avonia Sothoron and Phœbus Verne, who had been spending the Christmas holidays, with a pleasant company of friends and relatives, at a gay country house, where they had enjoyed themselves much more than they could have done in the fashionable circles of Washington City.

They had now come up to the capital, to be present at the wedding of Lancelot Roslyn and Nerissa Lovel, the preparations for which were now rapidly advancing.

At the Orphan Asylum, Mrs. Dunn and Eldiva were preparing to transfer their charges to their successors in office.

Notwithstanding all that was done to make the parting cheerful, there were many tears shed on both sides when their beloved teacher and matron took leave of the orphan children.

Ruth went to a private boarding-house on Pennsylvania Avenue, kept by an amiable widow of the name of Plunket, and Eldiva joined her friends at the Indian

Queen Tavern on the Saturday evening preceding the marriage of Lance Roslyn and Nerissa Lovel.

Tuesday, the 16th of January, their wedding day, dawned clear and cold.

Every member of the family party were up and astir at an early hour.

They met at a simple breakfast served in their private parlor and then separated to dress for the ceremony.

Avonia Sothoron, assisted by the two dressmakers, officiated at Nerissa's toilet. The wedding costume, the gift of Uncle Jubal and Aunt Joyce, consisted of an English thread lace dress, looped with orange flowers, over a white satin trained skirt, the bodice made low on the neck and short in the sleeves; neck and arms adorned with pearl necklaces and bracelets; dark hair worn in natural curls, crowned with a wreath of orange flowers, and covered with a veil of English thread lace that fell like a mist to her feet. White silk embroidered kid gloves, and white kid boots completed the costume. In her hand she carried a bouquet of rare white exotics of exquisite beauty and perfume, and a gossamer handkerchief of finest lace.

Her two young bridesmaids, the little daughters of Doctor Hamilton, wore dresses of India muslin looped with white roses.

Eldiva wore a ruby-colored velvet dress—a relic of her inexhaustible trousseau—a hat of the same with white ostrich plumes, a cashmere shawl and white kid gloves.

Avonia Sothoron, a blue-flowered white brocade looped over a white skirt, a white beaver hat and feather fastened with a diamond *margarite,* and carried on her arm a white merino shawl to be worn only in the carriage.

But, oh! for the pen of a royal drawing-room reporter to describe the costume of Aunt Joyce and Uncle Jubal.

Aunt Joyce wore a white brocade dress, flowered all over with golden roses and silver lilies, and looped over a white satin skirt trimmed with deep flounces of white Brussels lace; around her shoulders a deep ermine cape, and on her head the vast and magnificent Queen Caroline bonnet of white velvet, satin, lace, feathers and flowers, whose weight had nearly broken her neck at President Jackson's New Year's levee.

Uncle Jubal, persisting in the costume of fifty years before, wore a claret-colored velvet coat, a long white brocade waistcoat, white doeskin knee breeches, long white silk stockings and low shoes. In his hands he carried a cocked hat and a pair of white doeskin gauntlets.

There were three carriages drawn up before the tavern door, to convey the wedding party to church.

And when the ceremony was concluded with the sweet and solemn words—"Those whom God hath joined together, let not man put asunder!"—the young pair felt that the Lord had indeed joined them together, not only from to-day and for the term of their natural lives, but from the beginning and for all eternity, and that no power of man on earth or angel in heaven could ever put them "asunder."

The benediction was pronounced and friends and relatives left their pews and crowded around the newly married pair, with brightest smiles and warmest congratulations. Then the bridal party went into the vestry where the marriage was duly registered. Finally they left the church to re-enter their carriages.

They drove back to the Indian Queen Tavern, where an elegant collation had been laid in Mr. and Mrs.

Wells' parlor, to which only the members of the family, the bridesmaids and groomsmen, and very few of the most intimate friends, had been invited.

The little feast passed off pleasantly, and when it was over, Nerissa retired with her girl friends to change her wedding dress for a traveling suit of soft gray merino, with a chinchilla hat and mantle and muff to match.

"You look like a squirrel in your mottled gray coat, Nea!" was the only criticism upon this pretty, modest toilet; and it was made, of course, by Avonia Sothoron.

The company were now all assembled in the private parlor waiting for the stage-coach to call for the young pair; for Lance and Nerissa had declined to go to the seaport in state, by a private carriage, and had chosen to travel by the common stage-coach like ordinary passengers.

When the huge vehicle was heard rattling up before the doors of the tavern, Lance and Nerissa took leave of all their friends except Uncle Jubal, Aunt Joyce, and Eldiva, who went down to the sidewalk with them, saw them into the coach and received their last adieux, only at the last moment.

The stage-coach started with its freight of happiness and hope, and the friends that were left behind returned to the guests who were still lingering in the parlor.

Here Uncle Jubal proposed a final glass of wine to the health of the happy pair; after drinking which the company dispersed to their homes.

"And now!" exclaimed Uncle Jubal, turning to his two adopted children, "while our hands are in we might as well go on! When are you two going to make a match of it?"

Both the young people so suddenly addressed blushed violently, but did not reply.

"You were thirty years old your last birthday, you know, Phœbus. And Avonia is not far from twenty-eight. Gracious goodness! Why your aunt and myself had been married ten years when we were your age!" added the old gentleman.

"It is not my fault, Uncle Jubal. I would marry to-morrow! I would marry *to-day,* if Avonia would only consent!" bluntly replied Mr. Verne.

"Why won't she consent, then?" demanded Mr. Wells, turning sharly on his niece.

"Because she doesn't choose to!" saucily retorted Miss Sothoron. "I am sure Phœbus and I see quite enough of each other *now;* if we were to see much more we might be even worse friends than we are!"

"Oh!—Well! I don't insist on your marrying each other if you don't like to do so, but good gracious alive! marry *some*body! I don't believe in 'single blessedness!' I don't believe there *is,* or ever *was,* or ever *will be* such a thing. There, young people. You have my opinion and you may reflect upon it, while I go out to smoke my pipe!" concluded Uncle Jubal, as he arose and left the room, and all but Eldiva followed.

After Eldiva was left alone in the parlor she rang for a waiter and ordered a hack to be at the door for her use in a quarter of an hour.

Then she went to her own room and changed her velvet dress for a black merino suit, a black beaver hat and a warm Shetland wool shawl, and then passed down and out to the hack that was in waiting.

She entered it and gave the order to the hackman to drive to the Congress Burying Ground.

A drive of three-quarters of an hour's duration brought her to the great gate.

She alighted and went first to the street door of the keeper's house and rapped.

The hunchback opened the door and bowed respectfully to the visitor, as he made way for her to enter the office.

"I shall leave the city in a few days, and for a long and indefinite period. I have come this afternoon to make a final visit to the shrine I care for, and to ask you to find some one who, for a liberal compensation, would engage to keep the spot in good order during my absence. Do you think you can oblige me in this matter?" inquired Eldiva, as she drew a chair to the fire and sat down, for the day was very cold.

"Oh, yes, ma'am, it is always easy to find a man who will work for good wages, I think," replied the hunchback.

"Then engage one, and let me know the terms. It will require but an hour's attention about once a week, I suppose, and for that I am willing to pay very liberally. You can send to me at the Indian Queen Hotel," said Eldiva.

"Would you like to visit the place this afternoon, ma'am?" inquired the hunchback, taking his hat from the peg, preparatory to attending the lady.

"Yes, I am going there now, but I wish to go *alone*." replied Eldiva, decisively, as she nodded and passed out of the back door leading into the cemetery.

The keeper looked after her gravely and thoughtfully.

"Now, in the name of all the riddles that ever were written, why does that lady care so much for the grave of Old Man Condon? He can't be anything to *her* or to *hers!* Why, he must have died and been buried there before she was born! It passes my comprehension, and

I give it up for good and all, there!" concluded the hunchback, with a grave shake of his head.

In the meantime Eldiva had gone down the main walk, and turned into the path leading to the knoll in the southeast corner of the inclosure where lay the grave she was seeking.

All the ground was covered with snow except this one mound, from which it had been cleared, leaving the grass beneath as green as if it had been the spring instead of the winter; and the shining holly wreaths, with glossy dark-green leaves and bright scarlet berries that she had laid there at Christmas, were as fresh and beautiful as ever.

Eldiva knelt and prayed beside this mound, stooped and kissed the ground, and then arose with a sigh, and left the spot.

As she passed again through the keeper's lodge, she reminded him of his promise.

"You will be sure to find some one to take charge of that lot and send him to me at the Indian Queen," she said.

"I will be sure to do it before another day is over our heads, ma'am," replied the hunchback.

And Eldiva said "good-afternoon," and passed out of the lodge.

She re-entered her hack and drove back to the tavern in time to dress and join her friends at dinner.

In the evening Uncle Jubal—who was determined to make the most of his time and opportunities in the gay capital—took his whole party to the theatre to see a new theatrical star—a tragic actor of the period, by the name of Pelby.

And after the performance they had an oyster supper at the tavern.

CHAPTER XVIII

RUTH DUNN'S HOME

While Uncle Jubal and Aunt Joyce, the indefatigable old couple, were giving themselves up with more than youthful enthusiasm to the enjoyment of their holiday, with their headquarters at the Indian Queen Tavern, and drawing into their merry sphere the young people of their acquaintance—Phœbus Verne, Milo Yorke, Imperia North, Avonia Sothoron, and even the sad Eldiva—Ruth Dunn, in her quiet boarding-house, was waiting between hope and fear, desire and dread, the arrival of Lord John Daw's party from their long travels.

She did not like her boarding-house—not but that her landlady was the very gem and rose of landladies—but just because it *was* a boarding-house and there was no real privacy about it.

Ruth conceived a fancy to return to her old home, if possible, and to welcome her son *there,* where years before she had parted from him.

So she took the avenue stage and rode over to Georgetown, got off at the stand, and walked out to the market gardener's cottage.

But the market gardener had gone and the house was shut up.

On inquiring among the old neighbors, Ruth learned that the family had emigrated to the West, and that the house was for rent.

This suited Ruth's plans much better than she could have expected. For now, by taking the whole of the little house, she could have all the privacy she needed.

She went to the landlord that same morning and engaged the house by the month.

Then she hired a colored man and woman to go into it and whitewash the walls, scrub the floors, and wash the windows.

Two days later Ruth caused her little stock of furniture to be conveyed from the warehouse where she had kept it stored, and had it re-arranged in the very same rooms she had formerly occupied.

She did not furnish the remainder of the house which had been tenanted by the market gardener, for she had nothing to put in the vacant apartments; nor did she regret this, for *they* had no precious associations for her, and she did not even expect to remain long in any part of the building.

Ruth arranged the furniture in her own room just precisely as it had stood on the morning that her son had bid her good-by to go on his long travels—so very much longer than she or even he had anticipated at the time.

The same neat rag carpet, the work of her own hands, covered the floor; the triangular cupboard, with its glass doors above and wooden doors below, stood in the corner near the fire-place; the old-fashioned chest of drawers stood between the two front windows; the blue paper shades hung before them, and the white dimity curtains with the ball fringe draped them.

The patchwork quilt covered the neat bed; the old rocking-chair; the familiar little round table that served for meals, for writing, or for sewing, were all in their places.

Lastly, the same bright little wood fire in the open chimney and the same oil lamp for the evening were lighted.

Here Ruth Dunn sat, at her solitary tea, on the night of the day when she had moved in.

She was quite alone in the house, as the house itself was alone on the square. Yet she was not afraid, for there was scarcely any such thing as an act of violence or lawlessness known in that quiet and orderly neighborhood.

No, she was not afraid to be alone in that lonely house; on the contrary, she found the profound solitude and silence most congenial to her heart after the noise and excitement of the last few weeks, and especially so in her present frame of mind.

Here she could calm her feelings, collect her thoughts, reflect on her past and her future, and patiently wait the coming of her son and his father from their long, long years of travel.

What effect would this strange reunion have upon the future lives of all three?

After all these long and weary years of heart-wasting division, her husband, in his old age, had providentially discovered—what?

Why, that their love marriage, which they had been fatally misled by false reports into believing to have been too hastily and all illegally contracted, was in deed and truth both lawful and sacred.

But ah! what a mockery of fate to find this out *only* after a lifelong immolation of their affections on the altar of a mistaken duty—*only* after a lifelong separation for conscience sake!

They had parted when he was a handsome man of forty years and she a happy wife of eighteen; now he was over seventy and she was forty-eight.

Oh, bitter, bitter mockery for them!

Yet, for their son's sake, this late discovery of the truth was to be sincerely rejoiced over.

Roderick was young, and life was all before him. No shadow of reproach could now rest upon his birth; no bar could be raised to his inheritance of a son's portion of his father's vast estates; and here in this free country, where the laws of primogeniture did not exist to cut off the younger children of a family from all share of the property, his portion would be equal to that of his elder brother. Yes! Mr. John Daw might, in time, and probably would, inherit his uncle's English title, but half, if not the whole, of the American estate would descend to Roderick!

Ruth Dunn, who had never had a mercenary thought for *herself*, meditated on all these certainties and possibilities for her son.

Yes! though this strange discovery had come too late in life for the benefit of her aged husband or herself, yet it was not too late for that of their son.

Roderick would be rich, honored, and prosperous, and in his happiness his mother could be happy.

Ruth meditated over her solitary tea-table, not feeling lonely or fearful, but perfectly satisfied with the certainty that no visitor could "drop in" to disturb her quiet.

She had left her new address in a sealed letter with the matron of the Orphan Asylum to be given to her son Roderick when he should call there to inquire for it; and she knew that no one else would come to interrupt her.

So, in the old home she stayed and waited for his arrival.

She did not expect to hear from him by letter again. She supposed that immediately on landing at Baltimore

his party would set out and travel to Washington by a route as direct as the mail line, and so she felt sure that the first herald of her son's approach would be his own knock at the house door, or his footstep on the stairs.

Ruth Dunn watched and waited, and never left the house for five minutes at a time, lest Roderick should arrive during her absence.

She had laid in a sufficiency of provisions; she had spoken to a neighbor up the road to send her a pint of milk every morning, and she had a fine well in the back yard that supplied her with pure water. And if, with all these, she ever had an errand to be done in the town, she had only to go down to the front door and watch for the appearance of some poor child whom she could hire for a "fippinny bit" (six and one-quarter cents) to do it for her.

And, as she watched and waited, the month went on.

How many times she heard that longed-for knock at the door, or foot on the stairs, and ran down to meet her son and to find that imagination had deceived her.

Whether he would appear morning, noon, or night she knew not; but now, as the last days of the month slipped away, she listened always.

At length he came.

It was the evening of the last day of the month. Ruth had taken her solitary tea and had cleared the table, trimmed the lamp, replenished the fire, swept the hearth, and sat down in her rocking-chair with the first volume of Cooper's "Spy," trying to forget her eager anxiety in that story. But all in vain, for every sense was on the alert, listening as she had listened for the last ten days and nights. How still it was! The silence not even broken by the chirping of a cricket on the hearth, for there was no cricket there to chirp.

Then, through the profound quiet came the sound of a succession of brisk knocks at the outer door.

Down dropped the book! Up sprang the reader! And Ruth flew down the stairs, pushed open the door, and threw herself into the arms of the tall stout man who stood on the threshold in the darkness.

"Oh, Roderick! Roderick, my son! At last! At last! Oh, thank Heaven!" she sobbed, for joy, on his breast.

"Dear, dear mother! Dear, best mother! I have come home at last, never to leave you again!" he said, holding her close to his heart and kissing her very tenderly.

"Thank Heaven! Oh, thank Heaven!" she sobbed at intervals.

"And how have you been, dear mother? How are you looking, I wonder? Come into the light where I can see your face. I don't believe you have grown a bit older. Come into the light and let me see," he said in fond merriment.

"Yes, come up, Roderick," she replied, pulling him toward the stairs.

He turned back for an instant to shut and lock the door, that she had forgotten all about, and then he followed her upstairs and into the old familiar room, where his childhood and youth had been passed.

"Why, it looks so natural! exactly as it did years ago, when I saw it last!" he exclaimed, with a smile of delight, as he gazed around.

"Yes, Roderick, I wanted it to look so," she said.

"And to think, since that I have been all over the world."

"Yes, Roderick."

"And yet it seems as it was but yesterday that I was

here. And you, mother. Are you, too, unchanged? Let me look at you!" he exclaimed, putting his hands on her shoulders and turning her around to the light.

She smiled as she met his fond gaze and her smile made her face radiant and beautiful.

"No, I declare you have not changed. This is the same *dear* face that I have carried in my heart and seen in my dreams in all my long wanderings through these many years."

"*Have* you, Roderick? Have you borne me in memory so constantly, dear boy?"

"Have I not indeed! Who else had I to think of? But do you find *me* changed, dear mother?" he inquired, wheeling her gently around until *she* stood with her back to the lamp and *he* stood facing the light.

She looked at him lovingly and proudly as she said:

"Yes, dear boy, you have changed, but all for the better. You have grown stouter and darker, and you have a full brown beard. How handsome you are, dear Roderick."

"Ah! if any but a mother had said so, I should believe it! Mothers are always partial," he said, with a smile.

"But they are not blind. Now sit down, dear. Take this rocking-chair and make yourself comfortable, while I get you a cup of tea—or coffee? Which do you prefer?" she inquired, as she gently forced him into her own easy-chair.

"Neither, dear mother, neither. You need get nothing for me. We took supper at the Wolf's Head, where the stage-coach stopped at seven o'clock; and I could not eat or drink anything more to-night."

"Not—not—not even a cup of hot chocolate, my

dear? I could get it for you in a very few minutes. Do let me," urged Ruth.

"No, no, indeed I need nothing! And I will not have you running around when I want you to sit down with me and have a good talk, after all these years!"

"Very well, Roderick, dear," assented Ruth, as she drew her little sewing chair near him.

"No, no! don't sit there, mother mine! I want you very close to me. Where is that little settee you used to have? Oh, there it is, to be sure, in its old place, and covered with the same identical flowered chints pattern that I remember so well!" said the young man, as he pushed his arm-chair out of the way and then went and drew the short sofa up to the fireside.

"Now, then, mother darling, we can sit here together, *close* together, like a pair of true lovers, and talk comfortably. And we *have* always been sweethearts, have we not, mammy mine?" he inquired, as he adjusted the seat.

"*Always,* Roderick, my dear," she answered, as she put back her little sewing chair against the wall.

And when the mother and son were seated together on the sofa, with his arm wound affectionately around her waist, her head resting on his shoulder and her hand clasped in his, he said, in a much graver tone than he had yet spoken:

"Mother, dear, I have so much to tell you! Ah, so much more than you could possibly imagine!"

"Yes, I know, I know you must have, Roderick."

"Ah, but you do *not* know," he sighed.

Now, Ruth had been very anxious to inquire after the well-being of Lord John Daw; but a strange reluctance to speak of him, a reluctance for which she could not

account even to herself, had restrained her from asking any questions concerning him.

At this juncture, however, she became alarmed at the gravity of her son's words and manner, fearing that some evil had happened to the old nobleman. She asked:

"And—how is *he,* Roderick?"

"Lord John Daw?"

"Yes, my dear."

"He is as well as he has been for the last few weeks: but he is really more aged and infirm than his years would seem to warrant. His life has been a very sad one, as you know, mother; that circumstance may account for his premature old age."

"Ah, yes, yes; but, my dear Roderick, you have done what you could to cheer this cheerless age?"

"Oh, yes, yes, mother! Heaven knows that I have done so; I have gone *too far* to do so," sighed the young man.

"What, my dear? Gone too far to console him? Have you then, made known your identity to him? That was not going too far, Roderick. You were perfectly free to make yourself known to him as his son," said Ruth.

"That is precisely what I mean, dearest mother; yet I repeat, I have gone too far in my endeavors to make him happy in his old age, so far that I had nearly lost sight of those principles of rectitude you always instilled into my mind," repeated the young man, with another and a deeper sigh.

"I cannot believe that you could for a moment forget honor, or how your doing so could promote the peace or happiness of your—patron, unless, unless," said Ruth, as her suspicions leaped to a long conclusion, "unless you

have been concealing something to shield some person. Has young Mr. John Daw been going wrong? And have you been hiding his ill-doings from his father?" inquired Ruth, as she fixed her eyes upon the face of her son.

That face grew pale as marble under her gaze, but he answered frankly enough:

"No, mother. Mr. John Daw has never gone wrong to my knowledge. He was the model of rectitude that he seemed."

"I am glad to hear it. And how is his health now? Quite re-established?" inquired Ruth, choosing to ignore her son's self-condemnation, in the justice of which she did not for an instant believe.

Roderick did not answer her question, and she went on to say:

"I should think a man could never quite recover from the effects of such an experience. What an amazing adventure that was. The people of Washington talk of it even to this day! And only last autumn I happened to be in Dr. Hamilton's office waiting for him, and I picked up a medical pamphlet entitled, "Remarkable Cases of Suspended Animation and Resuscitation After Apparent Death.' And the very first one cited was that of Mr. John Daw's restoration to life after he had been laid in the vault several hours! Do the family ever allude to the circumstance, Roderick? Why, Roderick! Dear son! What is the matter? You are as pale as ashes!" she exclaimed, in some alarm.

"Do not be frightened, dearest mother! I am not ill —at least not ill in body! But I have a story to tell, which will startle you!—a confession to make which will shock you!—but which must be got through with

this night—for to-morrow morning I must bring about the first interview between yourself and my father," said Roderick.

CHAPTER XIX

THAT MYSTERY AT THE WOLF'S HEAD TAVERN

"'A CONFESSION to make,' Roderick, my dear!" repeated Ruth Dunn, in some perplexity; but without the faintest suspicion that the words implied any sin upon the soul of that son in whose spotless integrity she had the most implicit faith.

"Yes, mother, dear, a confession to make to you. who must be my judge; for I declare to you in the beginning, that I do not know to what degree I have been culpable, or to what extent I am responsible for all that has happened," said the young man, sorrowfully.

Ruth Dunn began to feel much anxiety, but she forbore to express it, lest she should discourage his confidence.

"Mother, I want you now to go back in memory to that morning of the second of May, some nine years ago, when I returned from my fruitless journey to Locust Mills, in search of employment. Do you remember all that occurred on that morning?"

"Perfectly. It was a memorable morning, my dear. You came home in a state of agitation scarcely to be explained by the fact of your having met, as you said, the young lady in whom you had become so deeply interested," replied Ruth Dunn.

"And yet out of that unexpected meeting came the events that lead to this confession. But there were

other circumstances that made the morning of my return home so memorable, my dear mother."

"Yes, for on that morning you received a favorable answer to your letter of application for the situation of amanuensis to an 'elderly gentleman' who had advertised for one in the *Intelligencer,* and whom then, for the first time, you ascertained to be Lord John Daw, and whom, a little later on, you learned from me to be your father. Ah, yes, that second of May was a memorable day, my dear," sighed Ruth Dunn.

"And the night that preceded the day was an even more memorable night," sighed the young man in response.

Ruth Dunn looked at her son with an uneasiness that she could not wholly conceal.

"I never told you all the story of that night, dear mother; nor should I tell you now, but that a crisis has arrived in our lives that renders it necessary to tell you that, and other things," said the young man, sorrowfully.

"Go on, Roderick," said his mother, in an encouraging tone.

"Mother," continued the young man, "you remember that I walked from Georgetown, out to Lucust Mills on the first of May—the very day, as it happened, though I did not know it at the time, upon which Mr. John Daw and Miss Eldiva Lisburne were married in Washington."

"I remember, Roderick."

"And that on my return journey I walked back as far as the Wolf's Head Tavern, where, finding myself very much fatigued, I determined to stop and wait for the Baltimore and Washington stage, which would pass about half-past ten o'clock.

"Yes."

"And I engaged a room that I might lie down and sleep for a couple of hours before taking the stage-coach home."

"I remember."

"It is necessary to recall these circumstances to your mind, dear mother, in order to explain what followed."

"I understand, Roderick."

"Well, I went to my room, and removing only my coat, I lay down on the outside of the bed to take a nap. I soon fell asleep, but was aroused by an unusual bustle in and around the tavern, caused by the arrival of the grand wedding party from Washington. Feeling hungry, I went down to see if I could get a bit of supper, and then I discovered that I had overslept myself and missed the Washington stage by which I had intended to return home.

"There was, therefore, nothing left for me to do but to walk to Washington in the dead of night, or to stop at the tavern until morning. I did not guess that upon my decision rested the destiny of three human lives. Yet, so it was."

"Roderick!" exclaimed the mother, in dismay.

"Yes; so it was. I decided to stop at the tavern until morning. I could scarcely get any attention, however, for everybody seemed to be occupied with the wedding party, who had been shown into a private parlor where they were to have supper. At length, however, I got a waiter to supply me with some bread and cheese and milk in a corner of the coffee-room. I had satisfied the cravings of my hunger, and had left the coffee-room, and was crossing the hall on my way to the bar, when my fate met me."

"Roderick! Roderick! Oh, my son, what do you mean?" demanded Ruth Dunn, in an agitated manner.

"Do not be alarmed, mother, but listen. As I was about to pass, the parlor door opened and three young ladies came out, crossed the hall, and went upstairs. The sight of the last one of the trio seemed to transfix me, for she was the beautiful unknown whom I had first seen and worshiped at the college exhibition of that year, and whom I had been vainly trying to find ever since. I never for a moment supposed her to be the *bride,* nor did the waiter, who had followed the three young ladies out of the parlor with a tray of glasses in his hands, and who then pointed out the supposed bride to me, in a tall, fair, queenly young woman who led the way. *That* mistake was another link in the chain of destiny that was being wound around our lives."

"Oh, my son! Go on!" sighed Ruth Dunn.

"Not to intrude upon these ladies, I waited until they had reached the head of the stairs before I began to follow them on my way to my own room. Just then, when the little, dark-haired beauty whom I had mistaken for the youngest bridesmaid, had reached the top stair, and I had my foot upon the bottom step, while I was gazing up after her, with all my soul in my eyes, I saw something white drop from her hands and flutter down to my feet. I stooped and raised it reverently and found that it was a delicate lace handkerchief, with the subtile odor of violet in it. When I looked up again, I saw that the three beauteous creatures had disappeared from the head of the stairs into the shadows of the upper hall."

"Ah, Roderick, my dear, you should then have taken the handkerchief to the office of the tavern and left it with the clerk," said Ruth Dunn, gravely.

"Doubtless, but I never even thought of doing so. I took it upstairs with the intention of hurrying after her and handing it to her, and with the longing hope of seeing her smile and hearing her speak. But, just as I reached the landing, I saw her half way down the hall entering a bedroom, in attendance, as I thought, upon the fair, imperial woman whom I took to be the bride. So, then, I went into my own room, which was dimly lighted by a wax candle in a sconce, and I held the elegant cobweb near the light to examine it closely. And then in its corner I found the name of its owner—*Eldiva*—minutely worked in dark hair."

"You told me all this at the time of its occurrence, Roderick, my dear; and told me, also, how you kept the handkerichef and brought it home with you," said Ruth.

"Yes, mother; but just here, between my taking that handkerchief into my room and my bringing it home in the morning, there was a fearful hiatus in my story that I did not then dare to fill up, though I must do so now."

"Roderick! Roderick! what do you mean?" demanded the agitated woman.

"Listen, mother, and be my judge! I will confess everything—all my folly, all my madness, all my despair! I intended to restore that laced and perfumed toy; but I held it in my hands and pressed it to my lips and to my heart, and kissed and caressed it as if it had been a living thing; for it seemed to my fond imagining to be as a white dove that had flown from her bosom to mine. I know not how long I had sat there indulging in this fond foolishness—perhaps an hour, perhaps more—when, suddenly, a loud scream struck my ear. I sprang up and dashed out of my room to see what was the matter, when I saw, flying down the hall, in her white wrapper, and with her long, dark hair floating

over her shoulders, this beauteous Eldiva, whom I supposed to be the youngest bridesmaid! And on meeting me she threw herself into my arms and clung around my neck, palpitating, trembling, shivering with some tremendous agitation!"

"Roderick! Roderick! You amaze me!" exclaimed Ruth Dunn, flushing all over the neck and face.

"She mistook me for some one else. She mistook me for her husband, to whom I bore an exact likeness. I did not know this then. I know it now. She had been frightened out of her senses by something, I know not what, and had rushed to my bosom for refuge, mistaking me in that half light, and by reason of my exact likeness to him, for her husband."

"Oh, how fatal. And you! and you! what did you do?" breathed Ruth Dunn.

"What could a man do under the circumstances? I, not knowing that she mistook me for her husband—not even knowing that she *had* a husband; never suspecting her to be the bride; only seeing the young creature whom I worshiped, maddened by terror and clinging to me for protection—I, too, lost my self-control. I wound my arms around her quivering form, pressed her closely to my bosom, covered her face with kisses, filled her ears with tender, impassioned words, and was so absorbed in the deep joy of comforting and protecting her, that I scarcely heard or heeded a swiftly approaching step, until suddenly, without any apparent cause the trembling beauty raised her head, uttered a succession of piercing, heartrending shrieks, pushed me violently from her and fled, still shrieking, down the hall."

"Oh, fatal! fatal mistake. I see it all!" groaned Ruth Dunn.

"I swear to you, mother, by all I hold sacred on earth,

and by all my hopes of Heaven, that she was as innocent as an infant, or as an angel. As for myself, I declare to you that I have no distinct recollection of what next happened. I was hurled from my heaven of bliss as suddenly as if I had fallen from the sky and struck the earth with a shock that stunned me. I did not then understand what had happened, or how it had happened; why this beauteous, frightened bird had flown to my bosom for refuge; or why she had fled, shrieking, from me. A sickening doubt entered my mind of this fair creature's sanity, a suspicion that she might be subject to fits of lunacy. As I lingered in the hall, two young ladies hurried past me and entered the room at the other end of the corridor where I had seen my frightened dove seek shelter. I stopped there to get news of her. I asked a chambermaid, who came into the hall, how the lady was who had been so badly frightened. The girl told me she heard the lady had grown calmer."

"And no one seemed to connect you in any way with the fatality of the night?" inquired Ruth.

"No one. I lingered in the hall and inquired of every one who passed, about the condition of the suffering lady, and was always told that she was quieter. Finally some one told me that she was going to return immediately to her friends in Washington. That did not surprise me at all; for I had heard earlier that the bridesmaids and groomsmen had attended the newly married pair only to the end of the first stage of their journey with the intention of returning to the city immediately. Yet I could not tear myself away from that tavern, or even from that upper hall, until at dawn of day, I saw a group of ladies and others come out of the room and go downstairs and enter carriages that were waiting at

the door to take them away. Then I knew that *she* had gone, and the house had no further interest for me, so I set out to walk home—still in utter ignorance that the lovely girl who had flown into my arms for refuge from some unknown danger, was the bride of John Daw. Still in utter ignorance that her bridegroom had disgarded and abandoned her for that most innocent indiscretion. Still—I swear to you, my mother!—in utter ignorance of all that I should have known, or—had the tumult of my whole nature been less distracting—I should have surmised.

"Had I paused in the halls and offices below stairs, I might have learned something from the talk of the people there.

"But I did not pause for a moment. Having paid my small bill in advance—as the rules of the house require of strangers without luggage—I walked straight out.

"Yet in that solitary walk through the deep forest, in the coolness of the early morning, my feverish excitement calmed down and then reflection brought to me some sense of my culpable share in the strange drama of the evening.

"I began to see that the young lady—bridesmaid, as I still supposed her to be—must in her frenzied terror have mistaken me for some one else—some intimate friend or brother, or betrothed, to whose arms she had a *right* to fly for protection! I began to see that I had behaved like a brute or a madman to her! And I cursed my folly and cursed myself for an idiot.

"And the more I thought of it the worse I thought of myself. In this state of mind I came home," continued Roderick, with a sigh.

"And I saw your distress," replied his mother, "and although you attempted to account for it by the surprise

of meeting your inamorata at the Wolf's Head Tavern, I *knew* that you were keeping something back from me."

"I was not willingly withholding my confidence from you, dearest mother; but I *could* not tell you *then;* and I *would* not now, but that, as I said, a crisis in our lives has come that makes it necessary to do so."

"And when did you learn that the lady with whom you had this fatal adventure was the bride of Mr. John Daw?" inquired Ruth.

"On that same day that was so full of revelations for me!—on that same day on which you informed me that my father was living in the person of Lord John Daw, in whose service I had applied for a place?"

"How did you learn it?"

"By the simplest means. That morning when I left you I walked down to the public reading-room at Fuller's Tavern, and, looking over the morning papers, saw the marriage of Mr. John Daw to Miss Eldiva Lisburne, and at the same time heard from the gossip of all the men in the room that the bridegroom had cast off his bride on account of some terrible calamity that had happened, through her own indiscretion! But the nature of which no one seemed to know."

"This must have been agonizing to you, my poor boy," said Ruth Dunn.

"Mother! there are no words strong enough to tell you how much I suffered! But I saw my duty then! I heard that the unhappy lady had returned to her own family at Shadow Hall, where she was lying very ill; and that the gentleman (?) had gone home to his father's house, at The Hill, and I determined to go at once and ask an interview with Mr. John Daw, give him the true version of the affair, and try to bring him to reason. I went out, hailed a stage that was passing and rode down

the avenue. Every man in the stage was talking of the mystery at the Wolf's Head, or listening to some new theory of it.

"At the foot of Capitol Hill I got out and walked rapidly up to the house of Lord John Daw, which, as you know, is situated on its own large grounds, directly north of the Capitol Park.

"Well, mother, when I reached the house I was told by the servant who opened the door that Mr. John Daw had just set out for Baltimore, *en route* for Canada, where he expected to spend the summer; and that Lord John Daw kept his room and refused to see even his most intimate friends.

"Then I asked where a letter might reach Mr. John Daw on his route.

"The servant replied that he did not know, but would inquire of Mr. Richard Daly, his lordship's agent, who was in the house. I sat down in the hall while he went away to get the information wanted. He soon came back with a slip of paper on which a few lines were written, to the effect that Mr. John Daw's address would be at the publishing house of Mr. Matthew Carey, Philadelphia, for one week.

"I took this address, walked to the Capitol Library, sat down at one of the tables and wrote a long, full letter to Mr. John Daw, giving him the true version of my unfortunate rencounter with the lady in the upper hall of Wolf's Head Tavern, as fully and as frankly as I have given it to *you* to-night, dwelling on the facts that the hapless young lady was distracted with terror and took me for some one else when she flew into my arms for shelter; for that discovering me to be a stranger, she instantly fled from me; that before that moment I had never in my life seen her to speak to her, and had never

seen or spoken to her since then. All this I begged him to put to the proof and so satisfy himself. Then I pleaded the cause of justice and mercy both for his own sake as well as for hers. And, having finished my letter, I posted it in time for the noon mail.

"This was on that memorable second of May that had been so fruitful in events to me.

"Eventually, I think my letter, with the aid of time and cool reflection on John Daw's part, had a good effect; for the next I heard of that gentleman was that he had turned his back from his contemplated Canadian tour and was at home again. And later on, of course, I knew of his illness and of his—*conditional*—reconciliation with his bride.

"But I am getting before my story.

"There, mother. You have my *first* confession, covering all my share in that night's mystery at the Wolf's Head. You know all now. And you shall be my judge. Say! was my offense quite unpardonable?" gravely inquired the young man.

"Nay, Roderick, my dear son, do not ask me, for I cannot answer you! I can *love* you dearest dear! I can love you through everything! But I cannot judge you! No, I cannot!" solemnly replied Ruth Dunn.

"Then you think my offense *was* unpardonable!" groaned the young man.

"I did not say so, my dear son. I did not even think so. I did not judge you. I *could* not judge you. I can only love you. Roderick, look into your own heart, ask your own conscience. If *that* can absolve you, Roderick, you *are* indeed absolved. But I fear, I fear that it never can absolve you until you shall have succeeded in bringing about a full reconciliation between that husband and wife whom your indiscretion separated on

their wedding day, and who have been alienated for the last nine years. Bring about a reunion between these two severed souls, Roderick, and then, and *then* only, you will pardon yourself, and need no other mortal's pardon!" said Ruth Dunn, solemnly.

"Then I shall never be pardoned in this world nor in the next," said the young man, bowing his head upon his hands.

"Do not say that, Roderick. Why do you say that?" inquired his mother, in a distressed tone.

"Because you tell me that my pardon depends upon my power to bring about a reunion between the pair my misadventure severed."

"Well, why not?" inquired the mother.

"Because no power on earth can reunite that husband and wife in this world—*for death has divided them!*" solemnly replied the young man.

"Roderick! What do you mean? Who is dead? Not Eldiva! I had a letter from her yesterday. And not John Daw, for you are not in mourning. Explain what you mean!"

"John Daw is dead——"

"John Daw dead! Impossible! When? Where? How? Oh, Roderick!" cried Ruth Dunn, almost incoherent in her emotion.

"Mother, you remember the death of John Daw, nine years ago. You remember that he died in the arms of his wife, to whom he was then fully and entirely reconciled."

"But—but—he was resuscitated after apparent death! I remember the circumstances well. No one could *ever* forget them. The papers were full of the story. It has now passed into medical history. He was strangely resuscitated."

"Never! He died entirely dead, and he was buried in the Congress Burying Ground, where his bones are resting to this day! Yes! and his widow knows his grave," whispered Roderick Dunn, in a husky voice.

Ruth Dunn, gazing in the face of her son, grew pale as ashes, muttering hoarsely:

"What is this? What is this? What have I to hear next? Roderick! Roderick! If John Daw died and was buried as you say—if his bones rest in the Congressional Cemetery, and his widow knows his grave,—*who was it that took his name and his place in his father's house?*"

Roderick Dunn was tremendously agitated. His iron frame shook like a sapling in a storm. He buried his face in his hands for a moment, and then suddenly raising his head, he muttered, harshly:

"Mother!—think of the face and form of John Daw; then look at me and answer that question for yourself!"

As Ruth Dunn met the eyes of her son, conviction of the whole truth struck her soul with the deadly force of a thunderbolt.

She covered her face with her hands, and moaned:

"Oh, my heart! my heart! Oh, Father in Heaven! I could have borne every other sort of trial better than this!"

"Mother! mother! Your words kill me! Dearest mother, hold your judgment until you have heard the whole! You cannot judge righteous judgment until you have heard the whole? Mother, speak to me!" wailed the young man, in a voice full of anguish.

"Roderick, my heart is broken!" breathed the woman, in an almost inaudible tone.

"Oh, for the love of Heaven do not say that, or you

will slay me? Mother, from my childhood up, did you ever know me to do an unworthy act?"

"Never, until this."

"Mother! will you hear my defense, before you utterly condemn me?"

"Roderick, I wish to hear it. Go on," whispered Ruth.

CHAPTER XX

THE MYSTERY OF THE CEMETERY

"MOTHER, let us go back once more to that day when I got a letter in answer to my application for the place of private secretary to the 'elderly gentleman' who had advertised anonymously in the *National Intelligencer*, and whom I then discovered to be Lord John Daw," began Roderick.

"Yes," breathed Ruth.

"And you told me the astounding news that Lord John Daw was your husband and my father, from whom, for no fault of yours or of his, you had been separated for so many years, and must, you said, continue to be separated forever."

"Yes."

"And then and there you told me the woful story of your blighted youth, casting no blame whatever upon him, and finally leaving it to my own discretion whether I should accept the situation of his private secretary or not accept it, and even whether I should reveal myself to him as his son, or not do so."

"Yes."

"Mother, I did not in my own secret mind feel so

sure as *you* seemed to be that Lord John Daw had been so guiltless toward you. I considered that my loyalty was due to *you,* who had cared for me all my life, rather than to the father, whom I had never heard of until that morning. I resolved to accept the situation in his household, temporarily at least, so that I might observe and test him before revealing myself to him.

"I said nothing of this to you, my dear mother; but I prepared for my experiment.

"At first I did not think of the disguise that I afterward assumed; but on that day when I called at the house of Lord John Daw, to see Mr. Daw, I noticed in the hall a full-length portrait of the latter, and I thought at a glance that I had seen my own reflected form in a long mirror—so perfect, down to the smallest detail of feature or peculiarity of expression, was the likeness between myself and that counterfeit presentment, which I knew instinctively must be the portrait of my brother.

"Then I recollected your information to me that I was but a younger image of what my father was when you first knew him, and an exact counterpart of what he must have been at my age.

"And I thought if I should go undisguised into the presence of Lord John Daw, this likeness would be seen at once and my identity would be recognized or suspected.

"So I determined to go in disguise—disguise in which my successful training in the Thespian Corps of our college had made me an adept.

"I determined that my disguise should be so perfect as to render me unrecognizable even by *you* if you should meet me in my transformed state.

"I had an old friend, Peter Dee, once a classmate of mine in the college, afterward a small farmer living

with his mother on their little farm across the Eastern Branch.

"Peter was about my size and age; but he had one deformity—a hump back. It occurred to me to make myself up to look like Peter in form; but to do so I should have to get Peter's coat made to fit his hump back, or one cut exactly after its fashion.

"I went out that night to see Peter, and telling him—the truth so far as it went—that I had a part to act, I borrowed his best coat for a week, intending to keep it until I could get one made like it, which I thought I could do in four or five days.

I brought this coat home, but was rather puzzled how to contrive to disguise myself in these small lodgings and leave the house without your knowledge.

"Chance favored me. You were summoned in haste to the bedside of a sick neighbor. During your absence I made myself up, using the same padding which had served me in making up for the stage. And when I looked at myself, in that little glass on the top of that old bureau, I was perfectly satisfied with the result of my transformation. The fair, tall, erect young man with cleanly shaven face was turned into a high-shouldered, humpbacked, stooping, scholarly looking gentleman in a wig and spectacles.

"I took my credentials with me, and watching my opportunity to slip out of the house unseen by the market gardener or any of his family, I got away, reached the stage-stand on Bridge street, jumped into a coach that was just starting, and rode down to Washington and up to the house of Lord John Daw.

"I have told you of my reception there, mother, how perfectly satisfactory it was to both contracting parties.

"Lord John Daw, for brevity, called me Mr. D., and

—according to his very eccentric manner—sometimes Dr. D., and even, occasionally, Professor D. At last I called myself Dee.

"You will understand now why it was necessary for me to come to see you only very late at night, and to leave you again very early in the morning. I had to take time between leaving Lord John Daw's house and reaching home at night to change my humpback professor's dress for the ordinary clothing of Roderick Dunn; and similarly between leaving home in the morning and arriving at Lord John Daw's house to change the clothing of Roderick Dunn for the humpbacked professor's garb."

"Where did you effect this change, Roderick?" gravely inquired the lady.

"In a solitary hut that stands uninhabited on the outskirts of a piece of woods near Lord John Daw's house."

"And how did you get a coat made for yourself to suit your disguise, for, of course, you could not keep your friend's best one very long?"

"I went down to Alexandria, where I was a perfect stranger, with Peter's coat on my back, and went to a tailor there and got measured for a new one, which was sent to my address at Lord John Daw's house the same week. When I received my new coat I returned Peter his."

"And all this time, oh, Roderick! did not your conscience reproach you for this deception?" sorrowfully inquired Ruth.

"No, mother," gravely replied the young man, "for I did not view it as a deception. I thought of it all as of a drama in which I was playing a great part. Oh, please to remember that this was nine years ago. I was

but little more than a boy then, and a boyish love of the stage, of mystery, and of adventure, had much to do with my action then and with utterly blinding me to the moral aspect of my conduct.

"Meantime, I was really pleasing my employer and—studying my father. I found him arrogant, eccentric, self-opinionated, but the soul of truth and honor. I learned to love and respect him."

"And you never reflected that loving and respecting, you were still deceiving him?"

"No, not then. I say that I seemed to myself to be acting a part in a play—a part that was interesting and harmless.

"I see myself from a different point of view now. I see how that disguise led to a deeper deception when the opportunity and the temptation was presented.

"John Daw came home unexpectedly. Time, reflection, and, more than all, my letter—which, being truth, must have borne the stamp of truth—had now convinced him that he had been too hasty and cruel in his judgment and treatment of his blameless young wife.

"He did not recognize in me the man in whose arms he had found her in the upper hall of the Wolf's Head Tavern on that fatal night; nor, therefore, did he know me as the writer of that letter of explanation. I was never formally introduced to him. Lord John always called me 'the professor,' or 'my secretary,' or, 'Dr. D.' So nothing was said to me of the state of affairs between the estranged pair.

"But I had all my faculties on the alert to learn something of the young creature in whose fate I was so deeply interested; and so I discovered that he had written to her and had exonerated her from all blame, even while, with morbid pride and jealousy, he confirmed his

own edict of repudiation, declaring that they must never meet again on this earth except—for a first and a last time—at the deathbed of one or the other.

"In the midst of all this, John Daw was looking miserably, and seemed to be suffering acutely. Lord John, who trusted in me and leaned upon me in a manner that was very touching and pathetic, confided to me his distressing anxiety on account of his son's health.

"'He is all that I have in the world, Professor,' he said, 'all that I have in the world! A great misfortune falling upon me in the prime of life deprived me of the only woman I ever loved, or could love, and condemned me to a life of loneliness but for this one son! If he should be taken from me, I should die!—not suddenly! not by a stroke of death! but having nothing left to live for, I should fail and die.'

"Mother, I cannot tell you—I cannot give you any idea of the depth of pathos in my father's look and tone when he said this! I longed to comfort him. *Now* do you begin to see the deep subtlety of the temptation that a little later on assailed me?" pleaded the young man.

"Yes, Roderick, I see!" sighed the lady; "I see, it was the temptation of the Prince of Darkness assuming the garb of an Angel of Light to make the worse appear the better reason! But go on, my dear, tell me the rest."

"John Daw seemed to fail day by day throughout that summer. The most casual observer must have seen that his days were numbered.

"Lord John's anxiety and distress was so keen and deep as to make my heart ache. In vain he implored his son to consult a physician, or to seek the bracing air of the sea coast or the mountains.

"The unhappy young man would do nothing for himself. He said that he knew he was ill of a fatal malady

which no power on earth would cure or even modify. He said he suffered enough from his disease without having to suffer from sickening drugs, and for the rest, that he preferred to remain and die at home, surrounded by home comforts and familiar faces, rather than go to a strange place, where he should miss them all. The old lord was in despair.

"'I suppose he is in the right, Professor,' he said to me one day. 'I suppose there is nothing that will save him. Ah! we Daws were a long-lived race until my father, the late duke, married the heiress of the white-hearted D'Arcies, whose hereditary infirmity appears in alternate generations. Our mother died of it before she was thirty years of age; neither of her three children showed any signs of it; but you see it reappeared in her grandchildren. All the children of my brother, the present duke, passed away before they were thirty years of age. And now my dear boy is going by the same way! Well, I shall not long survive him; nay, I *will* not! for if grief should be too slow in its work, a few grains of morphia will suffice to complete it.'

"I implored him not to talk in that strain and appealed to his religious sense.

"'Ah, well,' he said, 'I trust the Divine Providence will not permit me to be tempted beyond my strength to resist.'

"Early in September a crisis came. It was a very hot, oppressive day, and we were at luncheon in the summer breakfast-room which opened upon the garden, when suddenly, without an instant's warning, John Daw fainted and fell from his seat to the floor.

"Richard Daly and myself sprang up and went to raise the fallen man.

"Lord John Daw, with a complexion pale as ashes, with features drawn with anguish, stood over us wringing his hands.

" 'Lift him up carefully; carry him to his room; and *you,* James,' he said, turning to the footman, who was waiting on the table, 'fly to the stables, have the fastest horse put to the lightest gig, and drive for life to fetch Dr. Hamilton, or any other doctor that you can first find! For life, James! Fly!'

"You know what followed. Mrs. Daw—Eldiva—was sent for, and on the morning of the fourth day she arrived. I did not witness the meeting; but I was told by Lord John Daw—who instinctively came to me with all his joys as well as with all his griefs—that her presence did more for the patient than all the doctor's prescriptions.

"There was a consultation of physicians called for that day. I happened to be in my favorite nook, behind the crimson curtains that shut off the recess of the bay window from the rest of the library, when the three great medical lights of the city met there to consult upon the hopeless case of Lord John Daw's son.

"I could not hear all they said, for they spoke in a low tone, and the table at which they sat was standing in the centre of the room, at least ten feet from the bay window where I listened.

"But I gathered quite enough from their conversation to learn that they had not the faintest hope for the patient's recovery, and that they had a great desire for 'an autopsy in the interests of medical science and suffering humanity.' At least that was the way in which the doctors put it. But Dr. Hamilton, the family physician, assured his colleagues that the autopsy would be quite impossible; that from his own long experience of

Lord John Daw's character, he knew that the old lord would as soon allow the vivisection of his own body as the *post-mortem* examination of his son's remains.

"They finally concluded that they could do nothing whatever in the case but smooth the patient's passage to the grave. They agreed upon a prescription which they hoped might do this, and which was written by Dr. Hamilton. And then they left the library.

"Then it was, my dear mother, that the Tempter ensnared me. I sat there, full of pity for the old lord, *my own father,* whom I might not claim in my own person, but might perhaps console in the character of his elder son, to whom my undisguised person bore so exact a resemblance.

"Then it was that I conceived the daring plan that I afterward perfected and executed with so much ingenuity and success.

"I took the first steps at once. I wrote a letter to Lord John Daw telling him that I had just received the sad news that my only brother was on his deathbed, and that, therefore, I must leave the house at once. And with earnest expressions of sympathy and respect for his lordship, I closed my letter.

"You will observe, my dear mother, that in this letter I told the literal truth. My only brother *was* dying and I *had* received the news of that fact, while being an unsuspected listener to the consultation of the doctors.

"Having written this letter, I sealed and directed it, and left it on the table for his lordship. Then I went up to my room, packed my valise and left the house.

"I went first to that vacant hut of which I told you. There I put off my disguise and put on my proper clothing. Then I went to visit you and wait the issue of events.

"The next day, you know, we heard of the death of John Daw and of the vain efforts of the doctors to get leave to make a *post-mortem* examination of the body.

"Then I began operations. Oh, my dear mother, how much more culpable my sins seem *now,* in their confession, than they did *then,* in their commission!" said the young man, with a deep groan.

"Yes, my son; because now you hold them up to *your own view,* as well as to *mine!*" sighed the lady.

"That is one good of confession, I suppose. Well, mother, I commenced work. I had a half year's salary in my valise. I took it and went to the vacant hut where I put off my own clothes and put on my disguise. Then I went out to the cemetery and asked to see the sexton.

"I need not tell you how I won the man to my purpose, by pleading with him for the sake of humanity; by assuring him that no harm should be done to the dead, but much good to the *living;* by offering him a large sum of money—the whole of my own half year's salary and a hundred dollars over—which I felt pretty sure of being able to collect from the four physicians who were so extremely anxious to make this examination.

"Enough to say that the man yielded to sophistry and covetousness, and agreed to all I proposed.

"I then went and bargained with the doctors to give them the opportunity of making a *post-mortem* examination of John Daw's body, at midnight, after the funeral, in the parlor of the sexton.

"I will spare you the particulars of my plot and deception. I succeeded in deceiving the doctors, though at the risk of my life.

"The means that I had taken to insure the success of my plot, my malpractices upon myself, especially the

sitting out of doors at night, thinly clothed, in a deadly malarious neighborhood, at the most malarious season of the year, threw me into a severe and dangerous spell of illness which lasted many weeks, and which had nearly proved fatal.

"This was much more than I had bargained for. I had thought to have been restored to my father within a few hours, after I had laid myself down to personate his elder son; but, as through my own malpractices I had brought on a malignant form of malaria fever, this restoration was delayed for many days.

"The doctors, who had, as they believed, violated a vault for the purpose of making a *post-mortem* examination, and while attempting to do so had by accident restored the 'subject' to life, did not dare to declare their deed while that life was still in jeopardy; so they kept me concealed in Dr. Morris' house, and treated me with the greatest skill until convalescence.

"In the meantime, my plot, instead of serving the purpose for which it was conceived and executed, namely, that of comforting the bereaved father, only added to his afflictions; for when he went to the cemetery to have the body of his dear son taken from the receiving vault and laid in the grave, behold it was discovered that that body had been taken away! And the poor father went nearly crazy with grief, while the report was circulated that the body had been stolen for dissection."

"What was really done with it?" mournfully inquired Ruth Dunn.

"After the doctors had taken me away from the sexton's house that night, the body of John Daw was replaced in the empty coffin and laid in a grave that

had been prepared for it in the southeast corner of the cemetery," replied Roderick.

"It is there, then, that Eldiva goes to lay flowers," murmured Ruth.

"Yes, she knows whose dust lies there! I told her, under circumstances that I will presently explain to you."

"Go on."

"When I was well enough to converse freely I kept my own counsel, you may be sure! What a tale the good doctors told me! Fearing that I should be shocked into insanity by discovering that I had been buried alive and resuscitated by accident, they told me that I had been brought from The Hill to the house of Dr. Morris for change of air, quietness and more constant medical attendance, and that my removal had been effected during my insensibility. And in telling this the good doctors told what they believed to be the *literal* truth, as it might have been had *I* been John Daw.

"At length the day came when I was considered entirely out of danger and ready to be restored to my father. No doubt the prudent doctors wisely prepared him for the astounding announcement that 'his son who was dead was alive again;' for when they brought him to my bedside he was so quiet, so gentle, so fearful of startling *me*.

"Well, mother, I was taken home to The Hill and tended like an invalid prince! One of the worst complications of my new rôle was my supposed relations to Eldiva. An awful temptation beset me—to personate John Daw to her, as I had successfully done to all others."

"Oh, Roderick! Roderick!" groaned Ruth Dunn.

"I said the temptation beset me, mother dear, but it

was resisted strongly and successfully. I could *not* have committed so great a crime!"

"No, no, I know you could not! I am sure of it. Go on!"

"Lord John Daw told me that he had broken to my 'wife' the news of my restoration to life, and urged me to see her. I replied that I could not. Again and again he urged me, but with the same result.

"I longed with an unutterable longing to see Eldiva; *yet I dared not do it*—dared not until the doctors ordered a long sea voyage and extensive travels for the restoration of my health of mind and body. I was ill enough in both, Heaven knows!

"I was glad when they ordered me away, and gladder still when my father urged me to see Eldiva, if only to bid her good-by before leaving the country.

"Lord John had taken it for granted that in my refusal to be reunited to my 'wife' I was following out the course laid down by John Daw, who, though fondly attached to Eldiva, had declared that they two could never meet except at the deathbed of one or the other, never to be reconciled in life, whatever they might be in death.

"I allowed him to believe this; but when he implored me to meet my wife once more, only to bid her a kind good-by, I gladly consented to do so. To see her face, to hear her voice, to touch her hand—there would be no more than this—to ask her forgiveness for all the sorrow I had caused her (I could ask *this* most fittingly in both characters or either, for John Daw, in his morbid pride, had wronged her as much and had grieved her as deeply as ever I in my mad passion and infatuation had done); to do all this, to receive her pardon, and to bid her a kindest good-by, and then to part with her,

unrecognized by her—this was all I dared to hope from the interview.

"Lord John evidently expected more; he expected that this meeting would lead to a full reconciliation for life, and not for death! And he went off with alacrity to Shadow Hall to fetch Eldiva to The Hill! Ah me!

"He brought Eldiva to the house—he brought her to my room and left us together! That meeting *cannot* be described! It was the most blissful, the most painful of all the hours of my life, save *one*—that fatal one at the Wolf's Head!

"I had firmly resolved *only* to take her hand—but who can approach a maelstrom and not be drawn in! Again I lost my self-possession at the touch of her hand! Again I clasped her to my bosom; and in that ardor she detected me and in scorn and loathing hurled me from her!

"Yes, she of all the people around me was the only one who discovered my identity! It was a terrible moment! Neither could speak for some minutes. When I found my voice again I implored her to forgive me! and for the sake of the old man who could not have many years more to live, and to whom my presence was peace, comfort and happiness, not to betray me while he lived! I told her that I did not wish and did not intend to derive any benefit by the part I was playing then, or to claim the smallest portion of the vast inheritance afterward.

"Well, dear mother, she listened to me with a gentleness that nearly broke my heart, and she promised to be silent during the lifetime of the old lord, and for his sake only! And then she asked me, since I was personating the resuscitated John Daw, where the mortal remains of her husband had been laid. And I told her

that they reposed in the grave of the old keeper—in the southeast corner of the cemetery.

"Then she left me."

CHAPTER XXI

"THE MAD LORD"

THE next day my father and myself, with our attendants, left Washington City for Baltimore, whence we sailed for Liverpool.

"You, my dear mother, whom I contrived to visit once a week during this whole period, with the exception of the time when I was extremely ill at the Navy Yard, and with whom I even managed to spend the last night of my stay in Washington—you do not need that I should tell you anything about our voyage across the ocean, or of our extensive travels over the Eastern Hemisphere, for my letters from first to last have given you full details of all that," said the young man.

"Yes, yes, Roderick! Pass now to the discovery you made at Algiers, or rather to what followed it," said Ruth Dunn.

"Well, dear mother, as soon as Lord John had satisfied himself beyond the possibility of doubt that the story of the lady's maid was true and his erring wife had been murdered by the Arabs of the desert, as had been first truly reported many months before his marriage to you, he was all eager anxiety to go at once in quest of you.

"When I told him that I had good reason to suppose that the lady he wished to find was living in the neighborhood of Washington, and that the son whom he sup-

posed that he had never seen had lived to grow to man's estate, he became wild with impatience to sail at once for America.

"But when I suggested that if he wished to reinstate his deserted wife and child in their rights, it would be necessary for him to go to England and get certified copies of the registered marriage of the parents and birth and baptism of their child, he consented to the necessary delay, and he *praised* me with tears in his aged eyes, not only for what he called my wisdom and prudence, but for my generous sympathy with him and my magnanimous interest in the welfare of a step-mother and a half-brother whom I had never seen.

"How my conscience then tortured me! I was made to feel how keen was the reproach of undeserved praise! We went to England, travelled to St. Margaret's and procured attested copies of the register of *your* marriage and of my birth and baptism.

"And while my father was doing this, I walked around the town, made sacred to me as my dear mother's earliest home. I visited the old house, which my father pointed out to me. I went over the old garden. I visited the parish church where you were married, and every spot of which I had heard you speak, and gazed upon them all with a deeper interest than I had ever felt in looking upon the most time-honored monuments of antiquity, or on the most famous specimens of modern art.

"We spent but one day and night in St. Margaret's, and then we hurried up to London, for my lord was so impatient to start for America that he would not even take time to run down into the country to see his only brother, the Duke of Alton, whom he had not seen for twenty years or more.

"On the third day after our arrival in town we embarked at St. Catherine's Docks in the *Star of the West,* bound from London to New York; and, after a prosperous voyage of five weeks, we arrived safely at New York, where we stopped only one day to recruit before starting for Washington.

"There, my dear mother! You have my whole story with the exception of one last important item of explanation, which I shall give you presently. You must be my judge."

"Nay, nay, Roderick! I cannot judge you, my dear. You must judge yourself. But, dear boy, it seems strange to me that in all these years in which you were together, Lord John Daw never detected any of those slight differences in manner, gesture, glance, and tone that must distinguish even the most exact counterparts in form, feature, and complexion," said Ruth.

"My dear mother, you must remember this—that Lord John Daw had been separated from his son nearly all his son's life; John Daw had been brought up and educated in England while his father was engaged in speculations in America; that the young man only came to his father's house a few months before death; so that, the old gentleman had little or no opportunity of becoming intimately acquainted with those individual peculiarities of which you speak; and, moreover, that the old lord was so extremely dim-eyed as to be nearly blind," said Roderick.

"But," he continued, "there were times when my father *did* see a dieffrence in me from the son he had lost, and whom I was trying to personate to him.

"Sometimes he would sit gazing at me for many minutes, and then abruptly exclaim:

"'Jack, you have changed very much since your illness.'

"'In what respect, sir?' I would ask.

"'I don't know. That's the mystery of it! You don't seem like the same man sometimes to me.'

"But this would be said evidently without the least suspicion that I was *not* the same man.

"Sometimes he would look at me silently for a long time, and then slowly shake his head and mumble to himself, 'Well, I do suppose such an illness and death and resuscitation as *he* has gone through *would* affect a man.'

"But lately, dear mother, a great change passed over *him.* And this is the one last important item of explanation that I promised to give you. And I must give it now, for the time approaches for your own interview with my father."

"That interview! Ah, how I dread it! How shall I go through with it? But, tell me, Roderick—what is this that you have to explain? What new trouble?" sighed the lady.

"Ah! my mother, nothing that you or I could prevent; but you shall hear. From the time that Lord John Daw discovered that his first wife *had* died at the time at which her death was reported and that his marriage with his second wife *was* as legal as he intended it to be, he became so feverishly anxious to find you and your son that—as I told you—I felt obliged to tell him that I had reason to believe you and your son were alive in Washington City.

"This I told you in my last letter; but I could not tell you then that all through our tedious sea voyage he beset me with such anxious questions that in pity to him I acknowledged that I had known you and your son in

that city, and that I had some correspondence with you. He then made me describe your son to him. I told him that he was the living image of myself. Then he said:

"To think that some years ago I thought myself a bereaved and childless old man; but now I have two stalwart, grown-up sons. The one who was dead is alive again. And the other who was lost will be found.'

"These words he repeated over so often and so pointlessly that I began to fear for the stability of his reason —and with good cause, for after a while the monologue changed into this:

"'The son that died is dead; but the son that was lost is found! Job, in his old age, has son for son!'

"I hardly knew what he meant at the time, and I was utterly confounded one day when he called me Roderick and began to tell me of my brother Jack's illness and death.

"I asked him what he meant, but he only stared at me and inquired what I meant by my question?"

"Did he at last then detect—detect——" began Ruth.

"My imposture?" sighed Roderick, finishing her question. "No, dear mother, no! He seemed to know that his elder son was dead, and to think that his younger one was found. The hallucinations of an insane man are usually false. The hallucinations of my poor father strangely took the form of truth. I repeat it, that he *knows* his son John is dead, and that he believes that his son Roderick is found. He seems to have forgotten all about the pretended resuscitation."

"It is very strange," said Ruth, in a thoughtful tone.

"Yes, the action of a disordered mind is often inexplicable. He knows that I am his son Roderick restored to him; but he could not tell any one how or where it

happened. And he knows that he is soon to see his long-absent wife."

"He expects me, then?"

"Yes; I have promised to bring you to him to-morrow. So I have tried to prepare you for the change you will find in him."

"'To-morrow!'" said Ruth. "Why, it is already to-morrow! See, the day is dawning!"

As she spoke, she arose and threw open the window shutters.

"And I have kept you up talking all night!" exclaimed Roderick, regretfully.

"No matter, one night's loss of rest will not hurt me in the least, dear."

"Do go to bed now, mother, and get a few hours' sleep. We need not be at The Hill before twelve o'clock," urged the young man.

"No, no, I could not sleep, or even rest, if I were to try!—Besides, I wish to be at The Hill as soon as possible. But do you go and lie down, dear Roderick, while I get breakfast, which we will take together in this room, as in the old times. Go, my dear! Your bed is in its old place in that little chamber," urged Ruth.

"As if I could do anything of the sort!" exclaimed Roderick. "Besides, I think, if I remember those old times aright, I did not lie abed while you got the breakfast. I think I was hewer of wood and drawer of water to the little establishment. Where is that old pail? And where is—

'That old oaken bucket, that iron bound bucket,
That moss-covered bucket that hung by the well?'

And where is the well itself? In the old place, I'll be bound. Wells are not peripatetic! And I shall find it

in the yard near the garden. And where are the market gardeners? I have not heard a sound from any of them since I have been in the house!" said Roderick, as he went and found the familiar water pail on the lower shelf of the corner cupboard.

"The market gardeners have long since emigrated to the West. We are in the house alone, Roderick," replied the lady.

"So much the better. I like that!" exclaimed the young man, as he left the room with the water pail in his hand.

While he was gone, Ruth Dunn replenished the fire and then cut some bread to toast and some rashers of bacon to fry, and began to set the table.

Roderick returned while she was putting on her precious old china.

And he went and filled the kettle with fresh water and hung it over the fire, saying as he did so:

"You see, my years of foreign travel have not made me forget the home duties of my boyhood, mother dear."

"God bless you, my son!" exclaimed Ruth.

"Ah! say rather, God forgive me!"

"Ask that for yourself, dear boy! Ask for forgiveness of the Lord for yourself in all sincerity, and you will surely have it."

"I do, indeed I do! Let me toast that bread, mother. My hands have not lost their cunning in that culinary art, either," said the young man, as he took the toasting fork from her hand and placed a large slice from the pile upon it, leaving Ruth at liberty to fry the rashers of bacon and make the coffee, which she proceeded to do in order.

When breakfast was on the table the mother and son

sat down and ate it together, as in the old times—and for the last time in that house.

"When I look around on these familiar objects—this open wood-fire with its old brass andirons and fenders, and on this old rag carpet—how well I remember helping you to wind the balls for it!—and on that old four-post bed with its patchwork quilt, and that old bureau, and those windows with their blue paper shades, and the view of the road and the old college wall—and then lift this intimate old china cup to my lips; and, above all, when I see you looking so well, dear mother—I feel as if I had not been gone a day! as if, in fact, I had never been away from home at all! After all, will we be happier in the finer home of Lady John Daw than we have been here, dear mother?" gravely inquired the young man.

"It will depend upon ourselves, dear Roderick. Happiness is from within, not from without," replied Ruth.

The young man, having finished his breakfast, looked at his watch, saying:

"It is but half-past seven, mother dear. We are very early this morning. I do not think my lord will be awake and out of his bed before eleven, at the earliest. We need not get to The Hill before that hour. So now, if you please, I will step into that little room of mine and brush up for the visit."

"Do, my dear," replied the lady, as they both arose from the table.

Roderick went to his chamber and Ruth began to wash up the small breakfast service and replace it in the corner cupboard.

After about fifteen or twenty minutes Roderick re-entered the room with a renovated toilet, and hat in hand, saying cheerfully:

"I am going out to get a carriage from the livery stable, and will be here with it in half an hour. Can you be quite ready by that time?"

"Surely, Roderick, my dear; or sooner, if necessary," replied Ruth.

"Don't hurry," said the young man, as he ran downstairs.

Ruth set her room in complete order before she began to dress herself. That was her methodical way of doing business.

She was quite ready, however, by the time that Roderick drove up to the door.

He alighted and ran upstairs, and finding her waiting there, drew her arm within his own to lead her to the carriage; but fine manners cannot always prevail in small houses; they had to go down the narrow staircase in single file.

When they reached the lower floor Ruth Dunn walked out of her humble home, never to return to it again.

Roderick, at her request, locked the door and gave her the key.

Then he put her into the carriage, entered and took the seat by her side, and gave the order:

"To the Capitol Hill, Washington."

A half hour's rapid drive brought them to the door of Lord John Daw's house.

CHAPTER XXII

A LATE REUNION

Snow covered the ground, the roof of the house and the out-buildings, and powdered the tops and branches of all the evergreen trees on the lawn.

As the carriage stopped, Roderick pushed open its door, got out and turned to help his mother to alight.

He led her up the stone steps, from which the snow had been carefully cleaned.

"Has his lordship risen, do you know?" he inquired of the porter who admitted them.

"I do not, really, sir. Shall I send and inquire?" questioned the man.

"No," replied the young gentleman, as he led the lady on his arm down the hall and up the stairs.

"Sit here, my dear mother, until I go and see if he is up," said Roderick, as he opened a door on the right of the first landing and led Ruth into an elegant parlor, upholstered in mazarine blue and gold, and drew an easy-chair for her to rest in.

Ruth sank into the luxurious depth of its cushions and looked on the magnificence surrounding her, but without taking cognizance of anything.

Her heart and pulses seemed to stand still in suspense and expectation.

The door presently opened, and she turned around, every vein and artery now beating as if they would burst; for she thought the intruder was Roderick come back to take her to Lord John Daw.

But it was only a footman in livery, bearing a silver waiter on which stood a decanter of wine, a glass and a porcelain plate of delicate biscuits.

He placed the waiter on a stand beside the lady, filled the glass and waited.

Ruth took up the glass, and slowly sipped the rich and generous port. It seemed a very cordial to her fatigued and excited frame.

She had scarcely half emptied the wine when her son re-entered the room and whispered:

"Come, mother, dear. He is waiting for you."

She arose, trembling, took the arm of her son, and passed with him out of the room and into the sumptuous hall that led to the library at the rear of this second floor.

She recognized the place, though its gorgeous furniture was somewhat faded since she had seen it last. It had been shrouded in holland and shut up for nine years, yet it had lost its primal freshness.

Leaning on the strong arm of her son, she reached the library door. How well she remembered the muffled blue cloth doors that opened and closed so softly and silently.

Roderick, still supporting, led her in and led her down the length of the handsome room between walls lined with costly, well-filled bookcases, alternating with fine pictures, until they reached a library table, at which, in an arm-chair, sat a thin, pale, gray-haired old man, wrapped in a wadded gray silk gown and bowed with infirmity.

He was sitting with his head leaning upon his hand, while his elbow rested upon the table. He had not heard their silent approach, nor did he perceive their presence until Roderick, speaking close to his ear in a low and reverential tone, said:

"Here is my mother, sir," and then slipped away and glided out of the room, leaving the long severed pair together; for he felt that this sacred meeting must be unwitnessed even by their only son.

"Ruth! Ruth! Is this really you—*you,* at last! Oh! my lost wife! how many wasted years have uselessly separated us!" the old man cried, stretching out toward her two emaciated hands, and gazing at her with faded

blue eyes dimmed with tears, more of regret for the past than pleasure in the present.

She took those wasted hands and pressed them to her lips, to her tearful face, to her wearied heart, and holding them still she sank on the hassock at his feet. She could not speak.

"Since I learned that I might lawfully seek you I have been counting the days until I found you! And now I have you here; but, oh, my soul! for these wasted years! All your fault, Ruth! All your fault, my dear! If you had had more religion and less superstition we should never have parted; we should never have wasted all these years!" he sighed.

"But we thought your wife—reported dead—was living. We thought the law of the Most High stood between us," pleaded Ruth, still kissing those old hands, still pressing them to her lips and to her heart. "We thought that the law of the Most High divided us!"

"In the person of a guilty woman, a false wife? Oh, Ruth!"

"Yet whom you had taken for better or for *worse,* until death should part you. Oh, John!"

"Death *had* parted us, my dear."

"But we did not know it. And if—believing that that woman still lived, and that law still divided us—we had united our lives, we should have sinned. Let us not look to the irrecoverable past. Let us make what we can of the future," pleaded Ruth.

"The future! Ah! my dear, how much of the future is mine? I am over seventy years of age!"

"The whole eternal future is yours, even though but a few years of it may be passed here on earth."

"I have grown an old man—an old, old man!" he

sighed. "Sorrow and loneliness has aged me even more than years!"

"But your soul knows no age," said Ruth, in a soothing tone.

"Does it not? I don't know. Let me look at you, Ruth. Sit close beside me. Lean your head toward mine. I wish to see you closely. My eyes are dim," he said, clasping his hands upon hers that held them, and trying to draw her up.

She arose and took a chair close beside him, put her hands each side his head and drew his face down to hers.

"Ah! you are young, Ruth—you are young and handsome. You might almost be my granddaughter," he said, gazing closely into the mature beauty of her matronly face.

"Oh, no," she smiled; "that could not be possible. I am forty-six, you know."

"You don't look it. No, indeed, you don't look it. If you were a woman of fashion you could make yourself up for twenty-five easily."

"Our son is older than that. Our son is twenty-eight," smiled Ruth.

"Our son! Yes, our dear son! Am I not a modern Job? Our dear son came to me after I had lost my first-born, John. I don't remember—" here the old man put his hand to his brow with a confused and distressful look. "I am not clear how or when he came to me. I wish I could recollect."

"He came to you almost a month after the departure of your eldest son; but do not try to recall the sorrowful past. Thank the Lord for the present, dear," said the lady, gently.

"I do! I do, indeed! Do you know that for a time

I almost fancied that Roderick was John come to life again? But they were so much alike. So exactly alike, in *person,* I mean, and in voice and gesture, and, in fact, in all external things; but Roderick is so much more affectionate, so much more dutiful, so much more of a comfort to me, than ever poor John was. Ah! but they had different mothers! Both sons, in all outward appearance, closely resembled me in my youth, and closely resembled each other; but in their dispositions they resembled their mothers. John had all the hardness of his mother. Now, I always thought his conduct to his young bride was most unnaturally hard and cruel. She was perfectly blameless in that affair at the Wolf's Head, as even he acknowledged; yet he discarded her on their wedding day, and refused to be reconciled to her until he came upon his deathbed! I have been called hard and cruel. I opposed the match at first, because I did approve of such unequal marriages. But when I found the heart of my son set upon the match I agreed to it. But hard and cruel as I have been called, Ruth, I could not have discarded a young bride for a mistake in which she was perfectly innocent."

"No, I am sure you could not," assented Ruth.

"Nor Roderick could not," added the old lord.

"No; I am sure that Roderick could never have been so cruel and unjust," again assented the lady.

"Because, you see, it was John's hardness derived from his mother. And Roderick has so much of your fine humanity, Ruth! Your delicate sense of justice and mercy," continued the old lord.

The lady bowed in silence. Remembering then, as she did, the confession that Roderick had made to her, she could do no more.

"Ruth, I wonder what has become of that dear young lady?" inquired the old lord.

"Your son's widow?" asked the lady.

"Yes! *She* is proud and stiff-necked, too! But I must say I respect her for being so! Richard Daly informs me that she has never drawn one dollar of the handsome sum that was placed in her account in the bank of Washington. Yes! I do honor her independence! If her husband would not give her recognition in his life she was right to refuse everything from his family after his death. But, poor John. *He* could not help being hard! Where is she now, Ruth? Do you know? But why should I ask you? Of course you know nothing about her."

"Yes, I do. I know that Mrs. John Daw is at present with her uncle and aunt, Mr. and Mrs. Jubal Wells, at the Indian Queen Hotel. And that she intends to return with them at the end of the Washington season, to their country home at Bloomfield."

"Indeed! Do you know her, then?"

"Oh, yes! I have known her for years, quite intimately."

"In—*deed!* Then, perhaps, you can tell me, has she married a second time?"

"Certainly not! Didn't you hear me call her Mrs. John Daw?"

"Oh, ay, yes, to be sure! Of course she is not married again! But she may be! She is a young woman yet—not more than twenty-seven or twenty-eight years of age! And she must be a very beautiful one; much more beautiful than she was nine years ago."

"She is so. I have never seen a more beautiful woman than Eldiva Daw!" exclaimed Ruth.

"Then you never looked in the glass, my dear!" ex-

claimed the old lord, with a sparkle of his earlier gallantry and vivacity, as he raised her hand to his lips.

Ruth neither accepted nor repelled this compliment. She did not even notice it.

Lord John Daw seemed, in her view, to claim the reverence due to a father rather than the familiar love and respect due the husband.

The old man was the first to speak again.

"Tell me, since you knew my eldest son's widow so intimately, is there any likelihood of her re-marrying?"

"Not the slightest," answered Ruth.

"How does she regard the memory of her deceased husband?"

"With fidelity, I think. Up to this time she has regularly visited and decorated his grave on the anniversaries of his birth and of his death, and on all the church festivals," replied Ruth.

"Has she, indeed!" exclaimed the old lord, in a tone of incredulous amazement.

"She really has," persisted the lady.

"That is a most wonderful devotion to the memory of a husband who discarded her on her wedding day, and only consented to be reconciled to her on his deathbed!"

"Yes, it is! I have often thought the same."

"And there seems no chance of her marrying again?"

"None, as I believe!"

"And yet she is young and beautiful! Is her heart quite disengaged, do you think? Say, Ruth?"

"I do not know."

"But what do you *think?*"

"I cannot think."

"Ruth, my dear, I have always felt a high respect for that lady, and a deep desire to make up to her in some

way the wrong my son John did her in repudiating her almost immediately after the marriage ceremony had been performed."

"Better then than later," answered Ruth.

"So it was! So it was! Ruth, my dear, as Roderick is our only son and my sole heir, and is twenty-eight years of age, naturally I have been thinking about a wife for him."

"But, dear, would it not be as well to leave him to think about one for himself?" suggested the lady.

"But he *won't!* he won't, Ruth! And that worries me! I would like him to marry as soon as possible now. I want to see a family of grandchildren growing up around us before I die. Now, Ruth, there is no young lady in the world that I esteem so much as my daughter-in-law. Ruth, I would like to bring about a marriage between Roderick and Eldiva Daw."

"His brother's widow?" questioned the lady.

"Why, my dear, the Mosaic law held such marriages not only justifiable but obligatory! And I consider the Mosaic law in many respects a most excellent code of morals. But John was only Roderick's half brother, after all. And Eldiva, though she bears our name, can scarcely be considered as his widow, since she was never in fact his wife. The marriage ceremony was celebrated between them, their marriage was duly witnessed and recorded, and that was all. The bridegroom discarded the bride a few hours later, and never saw her again until the day of his death. No, Ruth, there is nothing in the law of God or man to forbid the marriage of these two, and I wish it could be brought about," concluded the old lord.

"Marriages should never 'be brought about,' dear.

Marriages should come naturally or they can come to no good," suggested the lady.

"And that is true, too! For the marriage between myself and the Lord Bishop of Norchester's daughter was brought about by our friends, did not come naturally and did not come to any good."

"Never mind! Let us forget the past and leave the future to the Lord," said the lady.

"So we will! So we will! But tell me about yourself, dear Ruth! Roderick has told me something of the brave struggle with the world you had while bringing up our son."

"But the world was very good to me," said the lady.

"The good find life good, mostly, whatever the cynics say! Go on, Ruth! Talk to me! Tell me about yourself. I love to hear your voice! Why, Ruth, the only woman in whom I have ever felt the slightest interest since I lost you, was a woman who spoke to me in your sweet voice! She came begging for a contribution to some charity or other, I have forgotten what, and I gave her fifty or a hundred pounds. I don't remember which. I know it was a very large sum in proportion to the object in view; but it was given for the sake of the voice in which she asked it. This was years ago, Ruth, before we went abroad."

"Yes," murmured Ruth, thoughtfully.

"Yet the tone of that sweet, low voice never seemed to leave my ears—at least my memory, for a single day since that time."

"What was the face like?" inquired Ruth.

"I—do not know. I do not at all remember. My attention was absorbed in the voice," replied the old lord.

"It was *my* voice," said Ruth, now conscientiously compelled to confess the truth.

"Yes, Ruth," he replied, misunderstanding the full meaning of her words. "It was your voice—your voice in quality, in tone, in cadence, in modulation—what shall I say? How describe the likeness, the identity? Ruth, it was your own dear voice in everything but in reality."

"But—that is just what I mean. It was my voice in *reality,*" said the lady.

"Eh? What? What do you mean, Ruth?" he inquired, uneasily.

"It was I who spoke to you that day."

"*You,* Ruth? *You* spoke to me? You so near me and I not recognize you! How was that possible? And oh, why did you not make yourself known to me if it were indeed you who spoke to me in your voice? All this needs explanation, Ruth, my dear."

"Yes, it needs explanation," said the lady, "and I will give it to you now. About that time circumstances had occurred that made it necessary for me to reveal to our son the secret of his parentage. In telling him the story of my early life and of our marriage, the past came vividly back to me, and brought with it a longing to look upon your face again. Only to look upon your face! I did not wish to be recognized by you. *Mutual* recognition must have made our meeting too painful and embarrassing, under the circumstances, as we then understood them. So that, much as I longed to see you, if I had not heard that your eyesight had been impaired, I should not have ventured to present myself. I happened to be one of the committee appointed to solicit contributions for the Sunday-school library. That cir-

cumstance gave me a pretext for calling on you, and I availed myself of it."

"And I never knew it! I never even suspected it. No, not even when your voice affected me to such a degree! Oh, how strange that I did not recognize your face!"

"It was best that you should not. I purposely sat with my back to the light and kept my face in deep shadow. Besides, remember that you had not seen me for twenty years, during which time I *had* changed; and—you had no expectation of ever seeing me again. You did not even know that I was in this country," said Ruth, soothingly, for she saw that he was inclined to blame himself for a lost opportunity.

"Strange! Strange! Ah, Ruth, if I had recognized you then I should never have let you go again! Our reunion would have been nearly ten years sooner," he sighed.

She did not contradict him, although she knew that he was mistaken, and that no arguments or persuasion on his part could have induced her to accede to his wish while there remained the shadow of a doubt as to the existence of his false wife.

He changed the conversation by asking abruptly:

"Ruth, do you think that you can induce my daughter-in-law, Mrs. John Daw, to come and see me?"

"I think so, I can try at all events," replied Ruth, doubtful in her own mind whether Eldiva would ever consent to meet Roderick Daw in this world again.

At this moment a bell sounded through the house.

"That is the first dinner-bell," said the old lord, glancing at the ormolu clock on its pedestal, that now marked the time at half-past two. "My medical attendant has directed me to take my principal meal in the

middle of the day; so dine at three P. M.; but if that hour is too early for you, my dear, you have but to say so, and it shall hereafter be changed to suit you."

"It is not too early for me; it suits me very well," replied Ruth, with a smile at the reminiscence of her own irregular midday meal, that was taken any time between twelve and four, and often omitted altogether.

"Very well, then, my dear," said Lord John stretching his hand toward the old-fashioned bell-cord and giving it a jerk.

A footman appeared in answer.

"Send the housekeeper here," said his lordship.

The man disappeared.

"You will want to take off your bonnet, my dear," he added to Ruth, as the door closed behind his messenger, to open very soon for the entrance of the housekeeper, who came in courtesying to her mistress, whom she had evidently been prepared to see.

"Lady John Daw will go to the apartments prepared for her," said the old gentleman.

"Yes, my lord. This way, my lady," said the obsequious Stacks, as she courtesied and turned toward the door.

Ruth arose and followed her conductress, feeling as if she were in a dream, through other sumptuous corridors and up another handsome flight of stairs to an upper hall, and finally, into a lofty suit of apartments, consisting of bedroom, dressing-room, and sitting-room, all upholstered in crimson and gold, and all heated by bright sea-coal fires in polished steel grates.

"These are the best rooms in the house, my lady," said the communicative Stacks. "They were newly furnished and fitted up for young Mr. and Mrs. John Daw on their marriage, but they have never been occu-

pied, my lady—never, I assure you; for when Mr. John Daw came home from the wedding *alone,* as all the world knows, he went to his old bachelor room, and that he occupied ever after whenever he was at the house. And I don't think as the furniture has been so much hurt, either, by being shut up so long. Any orders for me, my lady?"

"None," replied Ruth, gently, glad to get rid of the woman, who courtesied and left the room.

Ruth laid off her bonnet and shawl and went to the dressing-table, where tall cheval glass stood between the two lofty, crimson-curtained front windows.

On this table stood an open dressing-case, displaying cut-glass and gold-mounted scent bottles and ivory combs and brushes.

Ruth took up one of the brushes to smooth her own raven-black hair, and then noticed on the back of the brush the monogram "E. D.," and she knew then that this dressing-case, too, with its contents, had been intended for Eldiva, and had never been used by her.

"It is like the palace of the 'Sleeping Beauty' without the princess," said Ruth to herself, as she replaced the brush in its case, and, having arranged her simple toilet, left the room to find her way downstairs, and, if possible, to the dining-room.

In the hall below she was met by her son, who was evidently on the lookout for her.

"Well, mother, dear?" he inquired, as soon as he had drawn her arm within his own.

"Well, Roderick, the trying first interview is over, and with much less of painful emotion than I had anticipated," she replied.

"He was so well prepared for it, mother, dear. He has thought of nothing else for months past," said the

young man, as he led her into the dining-room and up to her place at the head of the table, at whose foot Lord John stood by his chair, waiting, and then he passed to his own seat at the side.

While the three were still standing the old Lord John Daw reverently bowed his gray head and prayed for the Divine blessing upon them all.

Then they sat down together.

And thus was Ruth Daw, after years of patient suffering, restored to her husband's faithful heart and re-established in his sumptuous home.

CHAPTER XXIII

ALL IS WELL

Before the close of another week the little home in the market gardener's cottage was once more broken up; the rent was paid to the end of the period for which it had been engaged, and the humble furniture, and even the clothing, was distributed to the deserving poor of the neighborhood—for the wardrobe that suited Ruth Dunn, the poor seamstress, by no means suited Lady John Daw.

Roderick attended personally to all this business, for the old lord was so exacting that he could not bear Ruth out of his sight for an hour; he meant to have the whole of her society now to make up for so much lost time, he said.

Only once he spared her from his side, and then she left him at his own request, to go to the Indian Queen Tavern to see Mrs. John Daw, and to beg her to come

to The Hill to call on the old father-in-law who was too much indisposed at this time to leave his house.

It was a fine, clear, windy day, in early March, when Ruth, dressed in a suit of rich dark silk, and wrapped in sable furs, entered the handsome Daw carriage, drawn by its span of spirited silver gray horses, driven by a many-caped coachman in the Daw livery, and gave the order:

"Indian Queen Hotel, Ladies' Entrance."

Then, as she reclined back in her cushions, she wondered how she had best present herself to her old friend Eldiva, now her daughter-in-law. Should she go into the public parlor and send her up one of those neatly engraved cards that filled her gold card-case, and bore the inscription,

LADY JOHN DAW,

which would seem to herald a stranger; or should she go up unannounced and enter Eldiva's presence with the unceremonious manner of an intimate acquaintance? She could not yet decide. In any case, she knew that she should surprise her very much. It was unlikely that Eldiva had ever heard of Lady John Daw, or, if she had, that she, in the remotest manner, connected that name with the individuality of Ruth Dunn.

While the lady was still undecided as to her course of action, the carriage drew up before the tavern, and the footman sprang down from his perch and opened the door.

Then Ruth suddenly made up her mind. If she should go upstairs to Eldiva's parlor, which she used in common with the Wells party, she should find the whole of them there: whereas she very particularly wished to see the young lady alone.

She therefore, on entering the house, gave her card to a waiter, who, after showing her into the public drawing-room, took it up, at her request, to Mrs. John Daw.

Ruth did not sit, but walked up and down the long room, which she was glad to find entirely empty.

A few minutes passed, and Eldiva entered.

Ruth advanced to meet her.

Eldiva recognized her at a glance, and involuntarily started a little; but it was at the rich costume that had replaced the plain clothes of the poor matron; then quickly recovering herself and amending her bad manners, she exclaimed:

"Ruth! Oh, is it you, dear? I am glad to see you; but why did you not come up?" and even while she spoke, she looked all around the parlor as if in search of some one else, and twirled the card that she held in her hand.

"I wished to see you alone, my dear," said the lady, in a low voice.

"And I am very glad to see you. Pray, sit down. Your son has returned, I see by the papers. I congratulate you very sincerely, my dear Ruth," she said, thinking to herself: "And that accounts for the rich silks and sables. He has given them to her;" and all the time her eyes wandered around the room as if still in search of some one.

"Why do *you* not sit, Eldiva? Come, take this seat beside me on the sofa," said Ruth, seating herself.

"To tell you the truth, dear, I was not expecting to see *you,* happy as I am to do so. I came down to receive the lady who sent me this card—'Lady John Daw.' My lord has been getting married, it appears, and has brought me home a mother-in-law, who has done me the honor to waive ceremony and to come here to call on

me. But I do not see her ladyship. There must be a mistake somewhere," said Eldiva, in perplexity.

"There is no mistake, love. Do you not understand? I sent you that card," said Ruth.

"You! You! Why, no, you could not. It is you who are mistaken. See, read, it is Lady John Daw!" said Eldiva, confidently.

"That is my name, dear," explained Ruth.

Eldiva stared blankly at the speaker.

"That is my name," repeated Ruth.

"*Your* name. *Yours!* Lady John Daw?" exclaimed Eldiva.

"Yes, mine."

"What! Are *you* Lady John Daw?"

"Yes."

"The wife of old Lord John Daw?"

"Yes."

"Well, this *is* a surprise. How long have you been married to the old lord?" inquired the young lady, still in a state of amazement.

"Some thirty years, my dear."

"Thirty years. Wonder upon wonder!" exclaimed the breathless and staring young lady.

"This requires some explanation, my dear Eldiva—an explanation that will make *many things* besides my own position clear to you. It was to give you this that I have called to-day."

"Come, come up into my bedroom. We shall be quiet there, and can talk without interruption," eagerly exclaimed the younger lady, seizing the hand of her friend.

"Now lay off your furs, or you will not feel them when you go out again," she advised, when they reached the bedroom.

In a few minutes they were seated together in two low chairs before the blazing sea coal fire in the grate, Ruth looking very grave, Eldiva all eager attention.

"Will you be quite free to hear me, say for half an hour? I shall not detain you longer," inquired the elder lady.

"Quite free, from this time until dinner time. Uncle Jubal and Aunt Joyce, that gay and festive old pair, have gone out making fashionable calls, in this wind! Aunt Joyce wearing her windmill of a Queen Caroline bonnet. I can't think what sort of stuff those old folks are made of that they 'go it' so fast and keep so well. Phœbus and Avonia are gone to the Senate to hear Randolph's speech. None of them will be home for hours. I can give you my undivided attention for as long as you shall require it," said Eldiva.

"To let you understand things clearly, I must tell you the story of my life: but I will tell it as briefly as possible," began the elder lady.

"There is nothing that I more desire to hear, after what you have already told me," exclaimed Eldiva.

Then Ruth commenced and related her life's romance as it is known to the reader.

Eldiva listened with sympathetic interest, and often with tears.

"I acted conscientiously, though under false impressions. If I had acted otherwise I should have sinned against my own soul," said Ruth, at the end of her story.

"And yet you made two lives miserable through so many years, dear Ruth!" exclaimed Eldiva, with tears in her beautiful eyes.

"If *you* had been in my place, what would *you* have done?" gravely inquired the lady.

"Oh, I should have done as you did, cruel as it

seemed! Every Christian woman would have done so, remembering that this is not the only life."

"And, after all, I have not really been so miserable as you might think. I have been happy in my work, humble as it was, and in my church and in my dear, good son," said the lady.

Eldiva shrugged at this last clause, and then said:

"And so Roderick Dunn is the son of Lord John Daw's second marriage with you! It seems strange to hear that now; but it certainly accounts for the startling likeness between himself and his elder brother—a likeness so exact as to have imposed upon me, and later on and for a longer period on his father!—How has that 'pious fraud' been cleared up, Ruth dear?"

"In regard to his father?" inquired the lady.

"Yes, in regard to his father," answered Eldiva.

Ruth meekly explained the situation, adding:

"It was indeed a mistaken act of mercy. Roderick saw the old man's heart breaking, and mind failing for want of his son, and rashly resolved to avail himself of that fac-simile likeness to personate that son and comfort that father. He never meant to profit by that *'pious fraud,'* as you have sarcastically called it, Eldiva, although you know that there can be no such thing as *pious* fraud."

"Forgive me, Ruth. You have defended your son well, almost successfully. I wish you could as reasonably excuse his conduct to *me* on that fatal night at the Wolf's Head Tavern; for of course, as he tells you everything, he has told you what happened there on that occasion," said Eldiva, gravely.

"Yes, my dear, Roderick has told me everything."

"He has! And now you must hear from me what I have never told any human being before!" said Eldiva.

CHAPTER XXIV

RECONCILIATION

"TELL me, then, Eldiva! You alone can unravel all the mystery of that night! What was it that drove you nearly mad with terror when you rushed to Roderick for protection, mistaking him for your bridegroom, to whom he bore so perfect a resemblance; and what, my dear, took you out of your chamber in a strange tavern at that hour of the night?" kindly inquired the elder lady, taking the hand of the other.

"I must begin from the moment when my bridesmaids, who had accompanied us the first stage of our bridal tour, and had seen me to my room, took leave of me to return to the city, and left me there alone.

"I was sitting in an arm-chair by the little open wood fire that the chilly evening, though it was the first of May, rendered desirable. I was dressed in a white wrapper, and had white slippers on my feet. So you see that I was not really in a fit trim to leave my room at all.

"Presently I arose to see if all my little effects were put neatly away, and in the course of my investigation I missed a little lace handkerchief that I knew I had had in my hand when I came upstairs, for I had waved it playfully to John Daw, whom I saw outside of the front hall door.

"That was the last I remembered of my handkerchief; and whether I had dropped it at the head of the stairs or in the long passage I could not tell; but I certainly had not brought it in the room with me, for it was nowhere to be found, though I searched every nook and corner of the square, almost bare chamber.

"Now, any other handkerchief I could have let go with indifference, but this was the gift of my dear little Nerissa, and it was bought with the money earned by the sale of her own flowers, which she had gathered and sent up to the hotel by Old Biggs. And the name on it was worked with her own dark hair, though not by her own hands, for she was our blind child then.

"I was so distressed by the loss of my handkerchief that I could not rest. I should have run downstairs to inquire for it, had I been dressed and had the hour been earlier. I should have rung for a servant had there been a bell in the room.

"As it was, I opened my door and looked cautiously out to see if there were any one within call. I looked up and down the whole length of that long, narrow passage, flanked by rows of blue doors on each side leading into the square, bare bed-chambers, and with a dim oil-lamp in a sconce at each distant end.

"But there was not a living soul to be seen. As I peered up and down I perceived a soft, white wisp, about the size and appearance of a small crumpled handkerchief lying on the floor at the farthest end of the passage, and near the head of the stairs I had ascended.

"I thought it was my handkerchief, and that I could run and pick it up and get back to my room before any one could come and catch me in my *dishabille.* I ran out silently and swiftly, but with a beating heart, and gained the head of the stairs and grasped the object I had seen.

"It was but a piece of crumpled white tissue paper. Full of disappointment I turned to run back to my room, which was about half way down the passage; but when I got there I could not tell which of two or three doors was my own. All the doors on both sides were

exactly alike, and though they were numbered, the numbers were too high up to be seen in that dim light.

"I was vexed at my carelessness in not having left the night taper or some other sign at the door. Still I did not think of any serious result. I knew my room was on that side, and about half way down the passage. It must be one of these. I would gently try the latch of each. If the door were fastened it would not be mine.

"I tried the first. It was fast. I went to try the second, when I saw by the gleam of the light within that the door was slightly ajar. I felt sure then that *that* was my room. I felt as positively *sure* of it as any one would be of anything—to be mistaken! I opened that door and entered that room——

"Oh, Haven, Ruth! more can be seen at a glance —more can pass in an instant—than can be described and related in an hour. All that followed in that room was seen at a glance, and passed in an instant! But it will take longer to tell you.

"A red-faced, dissipated, utterly brutal looking man sat, half undressed, and drinking, at a table. The room was full of the fumes of brandy. I saw, and turned to flee. But the brute started up, staggered toward me, and clutched my dress, and hiccoughing out words to the effect that when a lady made him a visit she must be entertained before she was suffered to depart.

"But though he was too drunk to have strength enough to detain me, and as I broke from him he reeled and fell back into his chair, I was so distraught with terror that I rushed, screaming, from the room and into the passage, and there, seeing my husband, as I supposed, hurrying to my relief, I fled to him for protection.

"And oh, Ruth! though he folded me to his breast

more closely, and kissed me more ardently and spoke to me more tenderly than John Daw ever had done, and though I saw and felt the difference in these, yet I only thought—if I thought at all—that this new ardor grew out of the new relations; and I was not undeceived until in sheer embarrassment I raised my face on hearing some one approach, and saw my unmistakable husband standing like a statue before us.

"What immediately followed I do not know. In that whirlwind of shame, terror and agony I lost my senses. What soon followed everybody knows. My bridegroom abandoned me that same night, and the next morning I was returned in dishonor to my home," concluded Eldiva, burying her burning face in her hands.

"No, no, no; not in dishonor, my darling girl! Never could dishonor attach itself to your spotless name and blameless life. And though there was much mystery, and more speculation, about that sudden abandonment and unexplained separation, yet no one ever wronged you by so much as a suspicion of unworthiness. I *know* that; and I was in the way just then of hearing more about you than you could possibly hear about yourself, and I heard nothing but expressions of the deepest sympathy with you, and the strongest indignation against Mr. John Daw. And in all this sympathy and this indignation I took a hearty share, Eldiva. The young man has long passed to his account above, so I will not dare to judge him *now*," concluded Ruth.

"No, do not judge him—at least not harshly. Consider the circumstances. I cannot again recall them. But only consider them. How black they were against me! I don't see *how* he could have done otherwise than he did. And remember that he became fully reconciled to me before he died," said Eldiva.

"Yes, I *do* consider the circumstances," said Ruth, ignoring the last sentence in Eldiva's speech, and they were very dark and condemning circumstances against you. And yet you were innocent. Let that fact teach you, dear Eldiva, to be lenient in your judgment of others—lenient in your judgment of Roderick Daw—against whom the circumstances of that fatal night were as dark and condemning as they were against you, and yet who was almost—not quite, but almost—equally innocent with yourself. And you should try to forgive him."

"I *have* forgiven him!" exclaimed Eldiva. "I forgave him on that day when he sent for me to bid him good-by before starting on his voyage to Europe with Lord John Daw. I *have* forgiven him; but I cannot see anything, alas! but the deepest dishonor in his conduct toward me!"

"Oh, Eldiva!" deprecatingly exclaimed the lady.

"Heaven knows I would be happy to think well of Roderick Daw; if I could at once think *well* and *truly* of him! But that is impossible! Consider it! Eeven from *his* point of view! He told you that I ran into his arms, did he not?" inquired the young lady, with a vivid blush.

"No, no, no; indeed he did not! He said, in effect, that when you were frenzied with terror, you ran to him for safety, evidently mistaking him for some one to whose protection you had a legitimate right," replied the elder lady.

"Exactly! And *he,* knowing this—knowing that I was a perfect stranger to him, one on whom he had never even set his eyes before—knowing me to be the just then married bride of his own half-brother and double, for whom I, in my wild affright had taken him

—knowing all this, he yet took a cruel and cowardly advantage of my mistake, and when I fled to him for safety, he received me with insult! Oh, Ruth! Ruth! I would almost rather lose the use of my tongue than use it to speak in this way of your son to you! for I love you, Ruth! and—I could have liked your son, if only I could have had reason to think well of him! Ruth! I have hurt you! Forgive me, dear," said Eldiva, with emotion.

"You have not offended me, dear girl; so there is nothing to forgive. I am glad you have made these charges. Remember that I invited you to make them; for until charges are distinctly made, they cannot be refuted."

"And can you refute these?"

"Assuredly. Let us take them up one by one. First, you said, that he knew you to be a perfect stranger whom he had never even seen before."

"Yes."

"My dear, he had seen you, loved you, adored you, and worshiped you for a year before he met you at the Wolf's Head Tavern. You were no stranger to him, except in name."

"*Indeed!*" murmured Eldiva, thoughtfully.

"Yes, indeed; for he had confided this mad passion to me, his mother and his only confidant. Do you believe me, Eldiva?"

"Assuredly I do, dear Ruth."

"Then the first charge is refuted, and the second is like it. You said he knew you to be then the wedded bride of his half-brother and double."

"Yes."

"He knew nothing about it, Eldiva. He did not know that he had a half-brother, or that he was in the remotest

degree connected with Lord John Daw's family, for I had not at that time confided to him the secret of his parentage. Nor did he know that you, who fled to him for safety, was any one's bride. He had been told by a mistaken waiter that the tall and Juno-like blonde beauty, Imperia North, was the bride——"

"I knew that she *was* taken for the bride by several people about the inn," said Eldiva, with a faint smile.

"And, therefore, by Roderick. And so the second charge is refuted," said Ruth.

"Yes," assented Eldiva.

"And now for the third and most serious of them all. You said, that knowing all these circumstances—which we have proved that he did *not* know—he took a cruel and cowardly advantage of your mistake, and when you fled to him for safety, he received you with insult. Was not that your last and gravest charge?"

"It was," admitted Eldiva, in a less confident tone.

"My love, Roderick Daw did nothing of the sort. He was, and he is, incapable of insulting a woman, under any circumstances, much less a woman who flies to him for safety, and, least of all, you, whom he adores and had adored for many months before that night. No, my dear Eldiva. Your lover was as honorable as you were innocent. He meditated no wrong; he took advantage of no mistake. He saw the woman he loved to madness fly to *him* for shelter from some unknown danger. He did not know her to be a bride, or even a betrothed. He knew certainly that she had mistaken him for some one else—for some brother, or cousin, or friend, he could not tell—but he knew her to be the woman that he loved, who had thrown herself in his arms, on his bosom, in deadly terror, seeking his protection. And, Eldiva, he lost his head—I think a saint might have done the same

—he pressed her to the bosom she had fled to; he lavished tender and endearing words upon her; he kissed her. Eldiva, how could he help it? Was he cruel? Was he cowardly?" pleaded the mother, with clasped hands and streaming eyes.

Her earnestness won her cause.

"No, Ruth, no; he was not. I did not understand. I did not know, I am *glad* to learn that he was not so much in fault as I had believed. And I beg your pardon, Ruth, and his, for the very harsh manner in which I have judged him. And yet, Ruth, dear Ruth, though he was not so guilty as I thought, yet he was wrong—he was very wrong," said Eldiva in a broken voice.

"I am not defending his action, my dear; I am only seeking to palliate it. *I* know he was wrong, and *he* knows it, and has repented it for years in dust and ashes of soul. Eldiva, I know now why you left the asylum. It was to avoid meeting Roderick. Oh, my dear! will you not, now that all is explained, try to overcome your repugnance to meeting him, far enough to enable you to come with me to The Hill to see Lord John? He has sent me to beg you to come to him, my child, because he cannot now come to you. Will you, Eldiva?"

"Dearest Ruth, I am too much shaken to bear any more excitement just now. I will go to The Hill tomorrow, and—I have *no* objection to meeting Mr. Roderick Daw."

"So be it, then, my dear! God bless you, Eldiva!" replied the lady, as she arose to take her leave.

CHAPTER XXV

CONCLUSION

Eldiva came to The Hill the next morning. Her card was brought up to Lady John Daw, who was sitting in the library with her aged husband.

The day was overclouded, raw and cold, and Lord John was feeling the change of weather in all his joints, though he sat in the depths of a thickly-cushioned arm-chair and was wrapped in a warmly-wadded silk dressing-gown.

"Who is it?" he inquired with some little querulousness, for he hated morning visitors to rob him of one minute of Ruth's company.

"It is your daughter-in-law, Eldiva," replied the lady.

"Oh, ah! Yes, to be sure! I had forgotten that she was expected. Go to her, my dear, and explain why I cannot go down to receive her—and bring her up here, if she will come," said the old gentleman.

Ruth went to the drawing-room, where she found Eldiva drawn up to the fire warming her feet on the fender.

"It was kind of you to come, love, on such a day, too!" said the lady, as her visitor turned her head and arose to receive her greetings.

"I hope Lord John is well to-day," said Eldiva, when they had kissed and clasped hands.

"No, I am sorry to say; the weather affects him. He cannot leave his arm-chair without suffering. He begs, in consideration of his ill health, that you will waive ceremony and come up to see him."

"Of course I will, with much pleasure," said Eldiva.

And the two ladies went to the library, where the old lord struggled up to his seat to receive his daughter-in-law.

"I am glad to see you, my dear," he said; and he took her by both hands, kissed her on both cheeks, and made her sit down on a chair as close as possible to himself.

"I am very much pleased to meet you again, my lord, and I trust that as the spring advances your health will improve," said Eldiva.

"Thank you, my dear; I hope so; it always does. You are looking very well, my dear."

Eldiva bowed in response.

"And—really much more beautiful than ever," he added, after a wistful gaze upon her face.

Eldiva blushed at this direct compliment.

"You will spend the day with us, my dear, and listen to another proposition that I have to make to you! There! lay off your bonnet and shawl right here without ceremony."

"I thank you, my lord, but I must return to the inn," replied the young lady.

"Why? why? why?" demanded the old gentleman, with a touch of his former impatience.

"Because my Uncle and Aunt Wells propose to start for their home to-morrow morning, if the weather should permit, and I have yet to pack up."

"And pray what will your maid be doing while you are packing up?"

"I have no maid, my lord."

"You have no maid—have no maid! have no maid! My son's widow has no maid! How is that? How is

that?" he demanded, with a spice of his ancient irritability.

"I do not require one, my lord."

"You do not! Yet there is a fitness in things! a fitness in things, my dear!" said the old lord; and then looking wistfully at Eldiva, he inquired: "And, by the way, why are *you* packing up? Going on a visit, eh? Not a long one, I hope, my dear! eh?"

"I am going to Bloomfield with my Uncle and Aunt Wells to make my future home with them."

"The mischief you are, Mrs. John Daw! Now, look here, my dear! Was it not understood that you, as my son's widow, was to reside with me, on my return from abroad?"

"I think not, my lord," said Eldiva, wondering at this new proof of that strange lapse in memory that seemed to have left a hiatus in the conscious life of Lord John Daw.

And at the same time the old lord put his hand to his head with a puzzled and distressed look as if he were painfully but vainly struggling to recall and arrange some forgotten or confused events.

"Eldiva will reconsider her plan and consent to make her home with us, where it is natural and proper that it should be," said Ruth, with a most imploring glance to the young lady.

"If you would render an old man completely happy, who is passably so now, you will do as we beg you, my love," said Lord John Daw, in a milder tone than he had yet spoken in.

"I have promised to return with my relatives to Bloomfield for a visit, and conditionally—not absolutely—I have promised to live with them," Eldiva explained. "So you see that I must keep my word."

"For the visit, yes; but do not stay long with them, my love. We want you so much more than they do," urged Lady John Daw.

"For how long does this visit last?" inquired the old lord.

"Well," said Eldiva, "it is not announced as yet, but I suppose that I may consider myself at liberty to tell *you* that Mr. Phœbus Verne and Miss Avonia Sothoron, the adopted son and daughter of my uncle and aunt, are to be married on the fifteenth of May, and I am to remain until after the wedding."

"Two months, my dear! that is a long time to wait, at least for me, who may not have very long to live," said the old lord, lugubriously.

"I hope your lordship may have very many happy years to live," said Eldiva, earnestly, touched by his tone.

"And then, when the two months have expired, will you come to us, Eldiva?" inquired the elder lady.

"As soon as the marriage is over I will come to you: and as the young pair are still to live with my Uncle and Aunt Wells, whose heirs and successors they are to be, I shall not be *needed,* and so, if you really want me here, I will remain with you," said the younger.

"That is my dear, simple-hearted, straightforward, unselfish girl!" exclaimed Ruth, kissing Eldiva with much affection. "And now you will stay to dinner with us, dear? The first bell has rung and it will be on the table in half an hour. We dine at two o'clock, on hygienic principles, my dear."

Eldiva, wishing to please her friend and her father-in-law, the aged and failing man beside her, bowed assent and thanks, though she knew that her stay would

involve the necessity of her sitting up half the night to pack.

"Then I will take you off to my room to lay aside your wraps. Come," said Ruth, rising.

Eldiva followed her conductress to Lady John Daw's handsome apartments.

Here she took off her bonnet and shawl, smoothed her jet-black ringlets, and declared herself ready to go down stairs.

Ruth led the way to the drawing-room, where they found Roderick Daw standing on the hearth-rug with his back to the fire.

He flushed to the forehead as he advanced to meet his mother and her visitor.

Ruth presented the two young persons to each other, as though they had been strangers.

"Mrs. John Daw, my son, Mr. Roderick Daw."

The gentleman bowed deeply and deferentially.

The lady inclined her head and held out her hand.

Roderick took it respectfully, and holding it reverently for a moment, said:

"Then you forgive me, madam—not merely in words and in form, but in deed and in truth?"

"I have learned from your mother, my dear friend here, that there was but little really to forgive," said Eldiva, gently.

"Yet that little and its consequences have laid upon my soul a burden of remorse that I have borne for years, and that only your full forgiveness can lift from it," said Roderick, earnestly.

"If you really think you need forgiveness from me, you have it not only from my lips, but from my heart," gravely replied Eldiva.

Roderick raised the hand that he still held, pressed it reverently to his lips, and then led her to a seat.

At that moment the door opened, and Lord John Daw appeared, dressed for dinner, and leaning on the arm of his valet.

Roderick sprang to take the place of the servant and to support the feeble steps of his father.

"Once in every twenty-four hours, my dear, I manage to get here, and that is at the dinner hour," said the old gentleman, as, leaning on the arm of his son, he tottered to a seat beside Eldiva on the sofa.

Dinner was soon announced, and they went to the table in the adjoining dining-room—not in the usual order of such processions, for the old lord again leaned on the arm of his son in walking, while Ruth and Eldiva went together.

Soon after dinner Eldiva prepared to take leave. The carriage was ordered to take her back to the hotel.

And the next morning the young lady left Washington with Mr. and Mrs. Wells and their party for Bloomfield Farm.

Everything went on well at The Hill. As the spring advanced the health of Lord John Daw improved.

Ruth and Eldiva corresponded regularly.

About the first of May Ruth received news of Lancelot and Nerissa Roslyn. Eldiva wrote that she had received letters from the young pair saying that they had pensioned off their uncle, Neil Carnes, who preferred to live with his bachelor set in London, and had disposed of all their English property, and were coming home, and expected to arrive about the middle of the ensuing May. "And I hope they may be in time for the wedding," added the writer, "for May is here already."

A week later came invitations to that wedding for Lord and Lady John Daw, and for Mr. Roderick Daw. And, much to the surprise of his wife and son, the old lord decided on accepting them.

"I suppose there is a decent inn at the nearest village, and I like country inns. As a rule, I have found them comfortable, especially in spring and summer," said his lordship, at the breakfast table, where the wedding cards had been received and read.

Later on, when he was alone with his wife, and she had asked him why he should undertake this tedious journey to be present at a marriage in which he could feel but a slight interest, he answered, testily:

"I should think, my dear Ruth, that being a woman, you might see my motive and approve my action. I want to bring our dainty young people together.—I—I think they like each other from what I saw of them that day Eldiva dined with us. What do *you* think, my dear?"

"I know that our son loves Eldiva," said Ruth, frankly.

"To distraction; To distraction! I saw it myself! And *she?*"

"I think that she is inclined to like him," admitted the lady.

"To be sure she is. To be sure she is. I saw *that* as well!" exclaimed the old lord, delighted to find his own opinion corroborated. "They would grow fond of each other; they would marry and be happy, if a punctilio did not keep them apart. Their mutual relations are awkward, but we must bring them together, Ruth, my dear, and therefore we must go to the wedding."

And so it was decided.

Preparations were immediately set on foot for mak-

ing the journey as safe and comfortable as possible for the infirm old lord.

The capacious traveling carriage, which in those days formed a very important item in the establishment of every wealthy family, was brought forth from its long retirement, dusted out, polished up, and thoroughly aired and dried for the occasion.

Grooms were sent on in advance with relays of horses from Lord John Daw's own stables, all along the route.

And finally, on the tenth of May, the party set out in the most comfortable manner, and traveled most leisurely to reach the wedding that was to come off on the fifteenth.

On the evening of the thirteenth, after a delightful journey, mostly through the green forest, they arrived in good condition at the White Cow Tavern in the village of Bloomfield, about half a mile from Bloomfield Farm.

But here, though they found themselves very comfortable, they were not permitted to stay long.

A servant of Mr. Wells, happening to be in the village when they arrived at the inn, saw the party and went off hot-foot to tell his master.

The next morning Uncle Jubal came in person, and positively refusing to hear anything to the contrary, carried them all off to the capacious and hospitable farmhouse.

And here Eldiva had a delightful surprise in meeting Lancelot and Nerissa, who had arrived the day before—coming from Baltimore by sea to Charlotte Hall and thence to the farm. They were blooming, healthy and happy.

Roderick and Eldiva met as friends, and only the

most acute observer could have detected the slight embarrassment of their manner in that meeting.

The next day, or rather the next evening, the wedding came off. It was a jolly, old-fashioned country wedding, to which all the neighbors, rich and poor, far and near, were invited, and to which nearly every one came.

The ceremony was performed at "early candle light" in the big parlor of the farm-house by the country parson whose church the family attended.

The fair bride looked fairer than ever in her simple and elegant dress of white India muslin, over white satin, white Irish gauze veil and wreath of orange blossoms, white satin slippers and long white kid gloves. The red-haired, nervous bridegroom, for a wonder, looked really better and more self-possessed than usual. Imperia North and Milo Yorke, who had come down from the city for the purpose, officiated with grace and dignity as bridesmaid and groomsman.

Lord John Daw, by particular request, gave away the bride.

After the ceremony was concluded, the congratulations offered, the huge bridescake cut and distributed and the hidden ring found in the slice that was served to Miss North, occasioning much jest and laughter, the ball was opened by the bride and groom, with the bridesmaid and groomsman for *vis-à-vis,* and as many of the young people who could find room to dance formed new cotillions, and then

"The fun grew fast and furious."

At twelve, midnight, an elegant supper was served in the long dining-room of the farm-house, after which the elder guests retired. The younger ones kept up the dance until daylight, and even then reluctantly left off.

The newly married pair did not start on a wedding tour; such was not the fashion of the neighborhood. They stayed at home "among their own people," by a succession of delightful entertainments were given in their honor.

Every day for a month there was a dinner, followed by a ball, at the house of some friend or relative in the neighborhood.

Lord and Lady John and Mr. Roderick Daw remained at Bloomfield, well content with their quarters, until near the middle of June—though they mixed but little with the gayeties that followed the wedding.

They saw with satisfaction the growing attachment between the two young persons who were so dear to them both.

And so they were more delighted than surprised when, on the day preceding their intended return to the city, Roderick led Eldiva before them and asked their blessing on the betrothal.

Six weeks later there was another wedding at Bloomfield Farm, but it was a much quieter one than the former, and was witnessed only by Lord and Lady Daw, Mr. and Mrs. Jubal Wells, Mr. and Mrs. Phœbus Verne, and Mr. and Mrs. Lancelot Roslyn.

Immediately after the ceremony the *really* "happy pair" set out with their party for Washington City, where it was arranged that they should take up their residence with Lord and Lady John Daw at The Hill.

One more "marriage in high life" came to pass that summer. The long betrothed pair of lovers, Milo Yorke and Imperia North, were united at the Military Headquarters of the Department of the Potomac, with so much splendor and *éclat* that this memorable wedding remains something of a wonder and something of a

scandal even to this day; for at the wedding ceremony were present the Administration, the Foreign Embassies, the Senate and the House, the Army and the Navy, and a host of distinguished citizens; and at that wedding feast wine flowed like water at an inundation. And it was whispered that the Administration and the Embassies became "elevated," the Army and the Navy became elevated, and the Senate and the House and hosts of distinguished citizens became elevated.

Lance and Nea's hearts turned fondly to the old home of their childhood, Shadow Hall. They purchased the old house, which was yet as substantial as a fortress and far stronger and much more durable than many of the fine new mansions in the young city.

They had it thoroughly repaired—

"From rooftree to foundation stone."

They made of it an earthly paradise, where they lived a good and happy life.

THE END

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